

**THOSE THREE CURVACEOUS
CRIMESTOPPERS ARE SKATING AROUND IN
THE DARK, ON THE DEADLY
EDGE OF AN INTERNATIONAL
ASSASSINATION PLOT!**



Charlie's Angels


#5 ANGELS ON ICE

Created by

IVAN GOFF and BEN ROBERTS

Based on the script by **RICK EDELSTEIN**

Adapted by **MAX FRANKLIN**

Ballantine/Novel  27486

Never bite the hand that . . .

Outside in the main factory room Durgas removed the mask and returned to the office. Only Kalik was there, seated on one of the wooden boxes. Durgas held out his palm to show the scarfaced Kalik the teeth marks on it.

"Who did that?" Kalik asked.

"A friend of Helene's named Sabrina Duncan. The same woman who stymied me from getting into the apartment yesterday."

"How'd it happen?"

"She came back tonight, and caught me in the apartment. This happened when I was dragging her over to stuff her in the closet."

"She saw your face?" Kalik asked sharply.

"Of course not. I put on my mask when I heard her come in . . ."

The mustached man seated himself on one of the boxes and examined his hand again. Presently he asked, "When do I go in?"

"Soon," Kalik said.

"I need two days to fix the guns, and there are only four left."

"You will have time," Kalik said. "Fix them right. There is much killing to do, and very little time to do it."

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CHARLIE'S ANGELS

#5

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A SPELLING-GOLDBERG PRODUCTION

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One

In a quiet section of Beverly Hills stood a square, two-story building of tan brick and old-fashioned design. A bronze plaque to the right of the high, brassbound oaken double doors read "CHARLES TOWNSEND." Beneath that, in smaller letters, was: "Private Investigations."

Inside was a high-ceilinged entry hall with a staircase to the second floor just opposite the entrance. To the left there was a wide sliding door, open now and leading into a spacious, thickly carpeted and lavishly furnished office. It didn't particularly look like an office, despite a desk with a telephone on it. It was furnished more like a drawing room, with a sofa, several overstuffed chairs, some end tables, a large cocktail table, and a bar in one corner. A number of original and extremely valuable oils hung on the walls.

John Bosley sat behind the desk, working on a set of books. He was a cheerful-looking, round-faced man of fifty with a full head of dark hair, neatly parted and worn moderately short.

The bookkeeper looked up expectantly at the sound of the front door opening and closing again and of heels clicking across the entry hall. He summoned a wide smile of greeting as Kelly Garrett entered the room. She was a slim, soft-featured girl in her mid-twenties with dark brown hair and sparkling eyes. She wore a smartly tailored beige suit.

"Morning, Boz," she said. "What's Charlie got for us today?"

"He hasn't yet said," Bosley told her. "Presumably we'll find out when the other girls get here."

Kelly went over to the bar to pour herself a glass of orange juice. The front door opened and closed again, and Sabrina Duncan walked into the office. Sabrina, a tall, beautiful brunette of about the same age as Kelly, had the regal air of a princess. She wore a light pink, form-clinging pantsuit.

Before Sabrina could say anything, Kelly spoke. "Bosley claims he doesn't know what it's about, Bree—which is probably a lie. He just doesn't want to repeat it three times. Want some orange juice?"

Sabrina answered, "No thanks," and Bosley said, "It wasn't a lie, Kelly. I phrased it very carefully. I told you that Charlie hadn't said yet. That didn't necessarily mean he hadn't told me. I meant he hadn't said over the squawk box."

"A distortion of the truth, if not an outright lie," Kelly accused him. "Of course he hadn't said it over the squawk box. He never does until we're all here."

The front door opened a third time, and Kris Munroe entered the room. She was a blond, shapely girl a couple of years younger than the other two. She wore white shorts and a white halter and carried a tennis racquet.

"Morning, everybody," she said cheerfully. "I hope this won't take long, Bosley. I have a ten-o'clock tennis date with a beautiful mass of muscle."

"If it's that tennis bum, Bart Ashley, the muscle's all in his head," Sabrina said.

"He's a tennis *pro*, not a tennis bum," Kris said with dignity.

"Your sister says he's a bum," Kelly told her. "And she told Bree and me to watch out for you while she's in Europe. Maybe I'll chaperone this match."

"I'm not a child, Kelly," Kris said with increased dignity. "I'm quite capable of choosing my own men friends."

Grinning at her, Kelly said, "Just kidding, Kris. But Sabrina and I do feel a sort of big-sisterly interest in your welfare."

"Ladies, can you save your discussion of Kris' love life until later?" Bosley admonished. "Charlie is wait-

ing." He lifted the phone receiver, dialed, switched on the squawk box and set the receiver on the desk.

The three girls were known as Charlie's Angels. The original angels had been Kelly Garrett, Sabrina Duncan and Jill Munroe, Kris' older sister. The trio had graduated together from the Los Angeles Police Academy, but their stints as policewomen had established records for briefness. They were still brand-new recruits when they were approached by John Bosley with identical and unrefusable offers.

His proposition was that the girls resign from the LAPD to work for a private investigator named Charles Townsend. Their jobs would require only periodic duty, with more time off than work, but they would have to be available for immediate call to duty at all times. Each would be furnished with a phone attachment on which she was required to tape-record exactly where she could be reached every time she left home. Bosley told them that while the work might be dangerous at times, they would always be on the side of justice, because Charles Townsend carefully screened his clients, and refused to accept assignments when he had the slightest suspicion that prospective clients' motives were unethical. Also: the angels would never meet their employer personally, although they would often talk to him on the phone. Their contact with Townsend would always be through John Bosley.

The inducement that made this strange proposition irresistible was the salary, which was considerably higher than they could ever expect to earn as policewomen. At the Police Academy they had become close friends, and they discussed Bosley's proposition at length before accepting it. It wasn't that any of them had any real doubts about the advantages of the offer, but only that there existed tacit agreement that either all would accept, or none would. The final vote for acceptance was unanimous.

Coincidentally, when an opportunity later arose for Jill Munroe to go to Spain to train as the first woman driver in the Grand Prix at Le Mans, her younger sister, Kris, had just graduated from the San Francisco

Police Academy. History was repeated when Charlie Townsend sent John Bosley to San Francisco to whisk Kris away before the SFPD could get any use out of her as a policewoman.

As Bosley switched on the squawk box, a smooth, cultured voice said, "All present or accounted for, Bosley?"

"Yes, Charlie."

"Good morning, angels," the voice said.

"Good morning, Charlie," the three girls chorused. Then Kelly asked, "What kind of hazardous assignment do you have for us today, Charlie?"

"Would you believe none?"

"None?" Sabrina said in a surprised voice. "Then why are we gathered here?"

"Just to plan some rest and recreation, angels. You have performed so well lately, and so profitably for the agency, that I felt you deserved a little bonus."

"We're getting a vacation?" Kris asked joyously.

"Not quite, Kris," Charlie said. "Just an evening of entertainment. I've managed to wangle four front-row seats for tonight's ice show at the Sports Arena."

Kelly said to the other two girls "That's a charity show for muscular dystrophy. All the Hollywood stars and local VIPs will be there!"

Sabrina exclaimed, "I know, at fifty to a hundred dollars a head. I imagine front-row seats go for a hundred." Raising her voice, she said, "You're being awfully generous, Charlie."

"Not really," Charlie's smooth voice answered "It's tax deductible. The tickets will be waiting for you at the box office."

"You said four seats, Charlie," Kris said. "Who's the fourth for?"

"Why, Bosley, of course," Charlie said. "He's been performing well too."

"Thank you, sir," Bosley said in a pleased tone.

"You're welcome, Bosley."

"Will you be there tonight, Charlie?" Sabrina asked.

"Of course, angel. Wouldn't miss it."

"Alone?"

"I'll have a lady companion."

"Where will you be sitting?" Kris asked curiously.

"On the far side of the rink from you four."

"In the front row?"

Charlie emitted an amused chuckle. "I sense you plan to bring along binoculars, Kris. Don't miss the show looking for me. There will be twenty thousand people there."

"Why, what makes you think I would do anything like that, Charlie?" Kris asked innocently.

"Because wondering what I look like seems to be a family trait among the Munroes. Jill was forever trying to find out too."

"What's your lady friend look like, Charlie?" Kelly asked.

"Curiosity killed the cat, Kelly. But I'll give you a clue. She is extremely feminine, extremely attractive, and will be wearing a totally different outfit than she has on now."

"Totally different?" Sabrina said with interest. "What does she have on now?"

"Her work clothes," Charlie informed her. "I must hang up now, angels. I'm in the middle of a project on my new hobby, and have a large area to cover."

Hanging up, he picked up his easel and held out his brush at arm's length, using the handle and his thumb to measure the length of the nude model's forearm.

Two

The ice show began at 8:30 P.M. The angels arranged to meet Bosley at the box office at 8:15. All arrived on time, and they were in their seats ten minutes before show time.

The audience was largely in formal dress, and the four spotted many celebrities. The angels and Bosley had dressed formally too. The girls wore long gowns, and Bosley wore a tuxedo.

As Charlie had guessed, Kris brought along binoculars—or rather, opera glasses, small enough to fit into her purse. They were hardly seated when she was focusing them on the front row directly across the rink from them.

"You won't spot Charlie," Bosley told her. "He has the talent of making himself invisible in a crowd."

"I think I've spotted him," Kris said excitedly. "Is he tall and handsome and distinguished-looking?"

Bosley made no answer. After a time, Kelly said, "Don't expect any help from Bosley, Kris. But my guess would be that he answers that description."

Kris was seated to Bosley's left, Kelly to his right, and Sabrina was next to Kelly. Kris passed the opera glasses in front of Bosley to Kelly.

"In the front row, just to the left of the aisle directly opposite us," Kris said. "Next to that extremely attractive woman in pink."

Kelly directed the glasses at the indicated man. After a few moments she giggled and handed them back.

"He's tall and handsome and distinguished-looking, all right," she said to Kris. "That's Gregory Peck."

Just before the show started, a popcorn and candy and soda-pop vendor came by. Kelly bought a large bag of popcorn and a candy apple. Kris and Sabrina each took soft drinks. Bosley bought nothing. As the vendor moved away, the first performers skated out onto the rink.

Bosley, his gaze fixed on the skaters, dipped his fingers into Kelly's popcorn before she could take any herself. Kelly watched, bemused, as he shoved the popcorn into his mouth. She offered the bag to Sabrina.

Bosley, his eyes still fixed on the skaters, groped for the popcorn bag again. But it wasn't there because Kelly was holding it in front of Sabrina. Bosley's fingers closed over the candy apple Kelly was holding in her other hand.

"Oops!" Bosley said, wrenching his gaze from the performers to examine his sticky fingers. "Sorry about that." Licking the red candy from his fingers, he dried them with a handkerchief.

"It's all right," Kelly said. "I bought it for you."

"You did?" Bosley said, pleased, accepting it and biting into it. "Very considerate of you."

Actually Kelly had bought him the candy apple in hopes that it would keep his fingers out of her popcorn. But as she now passed the bag in front of Bosley to Kris, his hand automatically dipped in for another handful.

As the angels and Bosley left the Sports Arena and headed for the parking lot, Sabrina said to Bosley, "That was terrific. Will you thank Charlie for the tickets?"

"You can thank him yourself in the morning."

Kris put in eagerly, "You don't mean in person, finally?"

"No. By phone. From Max's office."

"Max?" Kelly said. "Who's Max?"

"Max Brown. Fella who put on this little charity shindig."

"You mean he owns the ice show?" Sabrina asked. Bosley nodded. "He's an old friend of Charlie's."

The girls had come in Kelly's Cobra. When they reached it, Kelly put the key in the door lock, then paused to gaze at Bosley from narrowed eyes.

"Rest and recreation, Charlie said . . . Why do I suddenly get the feeling that this was not strictly for fun?"

Smiling enigmatically, Bosley began to move on toward his own car, parked two lanes beyond.

"Bosley!" Kelly said in a commanding tone.

Halting only a couple of paces away, Bosley turned. "Yes, Kelly?"

"We were working tonight, weren't we?"

"Well, in a sense," he admitted. "As a matter of fact, Max has some minor problems. Charlie wants to see if we can help."

"What kind of problems?" Sabrina asked.

"Max isn't quite sure. A couple of nights ago someone broke into his office."

"You mean he was robbed?" Kelly asked.

"Not exactly. One of the files was broken into, but nothing was taken."

"That doesn't make much sense," Sabrina said.

"It might mean *nothing*," Bosley agreed. "So we'll talk to Max. If there's a case, we're working. If not, we had a good time."

Kelly said dryly, "Even if I didn't get much of my popcorn."

Bosley gave her a sheepish grin. "I get carried away by popcorn," he apologized.

"What time are we supposed to meet in this Max's office tomorrow, Bosley?" Kris said.

"Oh, yes," Bosley said. "Eleven A.M."

"Here at the Sports Arena?"

"Oh, no. Max has nothing to do with the arena. Just with the ice show. His office is in the Exeter Building on Broadway. Max Brown Enterprises."

"Bosley," Kelly said, "sometimes getting information out of you is like pulling teeth. We're to meet you

at the Exeter Building at eleven in the morning, then?"

"Make it five to, in the lobby."

"All right, Bosley. Good night." Kelly finished keying open the car door, got in and reached across to unlock the other door.

"Good night," Bosley said. "And thanks for the candy apple."

Three

Afternoons and early evenings, the huge Sports Arena throbbed with activity, but mornings it was usually silent and deserted except for an occasional performer practicing. At seven A.M. only a single car was parked on the enormous parking lot.

Against the front of the building, near the front entrance but screened by a hedge both from the street and from people entering the arena, was a makeshift shelter consisting of a long, coffin-shaped cardboard box lying on its side, the open side toward the street. Sleeping in the box, fully dressed in a shabby suit and a tattered trench coat, was a scrawny man of about fifty, his pillow an empty wine bottle.

Heavy footsteps approaching the front entrance along the sidewalk caused Mason Fairchild to open his alcohol-reddened eyes. Despite the hedge screening his cardboard boudoir from observation, he could see out from his reclining position through the spaces around the individual trunks of the hedge. The person approaching was Billy Brinks, Fairchild saw, the so-called "trainer" of Max Brown's Ice Follies troupe.

Actually the twenty-six-year-old, six-foot-four-inch, two-hundred-and-fifty-pound mass of jellied fat was merely a general flunky, despite the word "TRAINER"

lettered on his sweat shirt. The title was an indulgence by Max Brown, because Billy was mentally retarded.

It must be seven A.M., Mason Fairchild thought, *because you can set your watch by Billy's arrival at the arena each morning.* As Billy unlocked and entered the front door, Fairchild closed his eyes again. Eight A.M. was his usual rising time.

Inside the building Billy Brinks paused in the lobby to listen to a scraping sound coming from the direction of the rink. Bypassing a door leading to the seats, he entered one of the sloping tunnels that led directly to the rink.

As he had surmised, the scraping sound was being made by the flashing blades of skates on ice. The two stars of the ice show were having an early-morning workout.

Jack Ward, a tall, handsome and leanly muscled man in his early thirties, was just concluding a tight turn while holding slim and lovely Helene Robinson around the waist. Helene, golden-haired and green-eyed and in her late twenties, was Billy's secret love. He watched jealously as the pair braked to a sudden but graceful stop. His jealousy increased when Ward failed to remove his arm from around his partner's waist, instead drawing her even closer against his body and smiling down into her face. Helene's answering smile, both sensual and invitational, made Billy hate Jack Ward.

Billy became conscious of the distant sound of a phone ringing. Hurrying across to another tunnel, unnoticed by the skaters, who had eyes only for each other, he jogged ponderously along the second tunnel to the Training Room.

As he entered the windowless room, Billy flicked a switch that turned on overhead fluorescent lights. The room was large, but sparsely furnished. There were a few lockers along one wall, a couple of training tables on wheels, a laundry bin, a weight scale and a small desk with a phone on it.

Lifting the phone, Billy said, "Hello?"

A crisp voice with a slightly foreign accent inquired, "Billy?"

"Yeah, this is Billy."

"Are they there?"

"Uh-huh."

"Is anyone else there?"

"Just me."

"Good," the crisp voice said. "When?"

"I figure about a half-hour," Billy said. "They're practicin' one of the numbers. They should send me out to get coffee in about a half-hour."

"Excellent. You know what to do."

"Yeah, but remember what you promised."

"The money will be forthcoming."

"I don't mean that," Billy said. "Well, I want the money, of course—otherwise there's no deal. But I meant about her. You promised not to touch her, just him."

"Of course, Billy," the voice said smoothly. "You'll leave the door unlocked?"

"Billy don't break his word. The door'll be open."

"Half-hour," the voice said. "We'll be waiting when you come out."

Hanging up, Billy went back up the tunnel to the rink in order to continue watching Jack Ward and Helene Robinson practice their act.

Billy's time estimate was pretty accurate. The skaters worked out only about another twenty minutes, and it was usually another ten after they quit before Ward sent Billy to the restaurant up the street for two carry-out coffees.

Billy trailed the pair to the Training Room, where each sat on one of the rubdown tables. Before helping Helene off with her skates, Billy automatically got her purse from her locker and handed it to her, then ran a paper cup of water from the water bottle and handed that to her also.

Lifting a small bottle from her purse, Helene took a pill from it, downed pill and water and handed the empty cup back to Billy.

"Thank you, Billy," she said pleasantly.

He beamed at her, wagging an invisible tail. "Okay."

Tossing the cup into a waste can, he knelt to unlace her skates. She reached down to run fingers over his head, as though he were a large, friendly dog. Billy glowed with happiness.

"Boy, it's too bad you always have to be taking those pills," he said.

Shrugging, Helene said, "Keeps the old asthma under control."

Ward, in the act of unlacing his own skates, said in a teasing voice, "How come you never help me off with my skates, Billy?"

Billy's smile disappeared. Silently he pulled off Helen's left skate.

"Don't tease him, Jack," Helene admonished.

Ward pulled off his skates, dried the blades with a towel, then walked over behind Helene in his stocking feet. She murmured with pleasure as he began to massage her shoulders.

"Mmm, you've got great hands," she breathed.

Glancing up, Billy saw what was going on and gave Helene's right skate a yank that pulled it off, but nearly pulled her off the rubdown table also.

"Hey, easy, Billy!" she chided in a gentle voice.

Without looking at her, Billy carried her skates over to her locker, dried the blades with a piece of toweling she kept in the locker for that purpose and dumped them on the floor of the locker with a clank.

Continuing his massage, Ward asked, "You got any plans for tonight?"

"No. Ummm, that feels good."

"Or for the next six nights? You know we have a whole week off?"

"Uh-huh. Wonderful, isn't it? But after we open for the season, we'll have no nights off."

"That's show business," he said philosophically. "But you love the applause. You were absolutely glowing last night."

"Wasn't that terrific?" she asked. "I love a packed house." She sighed. "Probably the last we'll see all sea-

son. Being a charity event is what brought them out."

"Don't be so modest," he said. "They came because we were performing too." He bent to kiss her on the cheek. Then both jumped when Helene's locker door slammed with a bang. Turning around, Ward took a dollar bill from his pocket and held it out to Billy. "Go get us some coffee, Billy-boy."

Silently Billy accepted the bill. He glanced back on the way out, and when he saw Ward still sensually massaging Helene's shoulders and noticed her eyes closed in pleasure, he slammed the door behind him.

Grinning, Ward said, "That oversized blob has a crush on you, you know."

"Oh, he just likes me," she teased. "He's like a big Saint Bernard."

Outdoors the sound of a car pulling up to the front curb caused Mason Fairchild's eyes to reopen. The car was a big black limousine with smoked-glass windows making it impossible to see the occupants. The license plate on its front, Fairchild noted with bemusement, read "DIPLOMAT."

No one got out of the car. It sat there with its powerful engine idling, waiting, and somehow ominous.

Four

Billy Brinks came from the arena's front entrance, leaving the door unlocked, and walked over near the limousine. From his cardboard shelter Mason Fairchild noticed with interest that Billy didn't get too close to the car, even though the expectant manner with which he regarded it indicated that it was there by pre-arrangement with Billy. There was an air of wariness about the oversized retarded man with which

Fairchild could sympathize; the waiting limousine made him uneasy too.

A smoked rear window of the car slid down without sound. A paper bag came flying out, plunking into Billy's midriff like a passed football. As Billy instinctively grabbed it with both hands, the car window slid closed again.

Removing a sheaf of bills from the bag, Billy crumpled the bag, tossed it aside and started counting the bills. The sight of so much money incited the watching derelict to action. Rolling from his makeshift bed, Fairchild climbed to his feet and hurried to a gap in the hedge a few yards away.

Billy wasn't aware of anyone being near him until a cultured voice behind him said, "Excuse me, sir."

Whirling, and protectively clutching the money to his chest, Billy relaxed with relief when he saw it was only the bum who slept in a box behind the hedge near the front entrance. Billy had discovered the shelter several days previously, but had told no one the man was sleeping there. There were few people Billy was able to feel superior to, and it bolstered his ego to feel he was protecting an inferior being. He had even gotten in the habit of giving Mason Fairchild an occasional small handout because that also bolstered his ego.

"What do you want?" Billy asked, a trifle patronizingly.

"I wonder if I might negotiate a loan."

"What?" Billy asked without understanding.

His gaze fixed on the bills in Billy's hands, Fairchild said, "A loan. I wanted to get a small loan."

Billy, never very sure of how to react to others, didn't know how to refuse, despite his feeling of superiority to this one person. After thumbing through the sheaf of currency, he separated a five-dollar bill and handed it over.

His beneficiary gave him a beaming smile. "Thank you, sir. You will be repaid the moment my ship comes in."

Turning, Fairchild made his way back to the gap

in the hedge. Billy resumed counting, found that all he had been promised was there, thrust the money into his pocket and waddled off down the street.

While his back was still to the limousine, four men quietly emerged from it and entered the Sports Arena through the door left open by Billy, unseen by Mason Fairchild. All were large, darkish-skinned, black-haired men, and all were dressed alike, in dark blue suits and matching turtleneck sweaters. One had a livid scar running from the outer corner of his left eye to the edge of his lips. He was carrying a small satchel. A second wore a thick, military mustache with waxed tips formed into needlelike points. The third had a squashed-in nose and the fourth had two gold front teeth.

As the four entered the lobby, the man with the military mustache said to the one with the scar, "Which way, Kalik?"

"Billy said along the second tunnel to the right," the scar-faced Kalik told him.

Kalik led the way from the lobby into the corridor that circled the building, and along it to the tunnel leading to the Training Room. The four were wearing shoes soled with crepe rubber that made no sound as they neared the door.

Kalik put an ear to the door of the Training Room. When he heard a feminine sigh, he set down his satchel, opened it and drew out four Halloween masks of the type that fitted completely over the head. Passing out three, he pulled the fourth over his own face. It had the image of Henry Kissinger. The mask of the man with the waxed mustache had President Jimmy Carter's face. The man with the bashed-in nose was Richard Nixon, and the one with the gold front teeth was an ape.

Kalik stooped again, took a bottle of chloroform and two thick washcloths from the satchel and handed them to the mustachioed man in the Jimmy Carter mask. "Use enough, Durgas," he said quietly. "We want them out quickly."

Nodding, Durgas unscrewed the cap of the chlo-

reform bottle and saturated one of the cloths with liquid. He handed it to the man with the bashed-in nose who was wearing the Richard Nixon mask.

"You take the girl, Faud," he instructed in a low voice. "Grout will handle the man."

Saturating the second washcloth with chloroform, he handed it to the gold-toothed Grout in the ape mask. After recapping the bottle and setting it back in the satchel, Durgas nodded to Kalik. Kalik reached for the doorknob.

Inside the Training Room, Helene was lying face-down on a rubdown table while Jack massaged her thighs and calves. Her eyes were closed and she was murmuring her pleasure. Finishing the massage, Ward gave her a playful slap on the rear, rolled her over and took her into his arms.

They were kissing deeply when the door opened behind them. They had no idea they were not alone until they were roughly jerked apart. A large man wearing a Henry Kissinger mask held Helene immobile on the rubdown table by gripping her biceps, while an equally large man masked as Richard Nixon pressed a chloroform-soaked cloth to her face. A man masked as Jimmy Carter had a stranglehold on Ward from behind, while a man in an ape mask held a cloth over his nose and mouth.

Ward's body sagged first. Helene held her breath as long as she could, but eventually had to breathe in the anesthetic.

Outside, Mason Fairchild was again comfortably ensconced in his cardboard bedroom, waiting for the liquor store a block away to open at eight A.M. With the security of having five dollars to spend, he took the last drink of muscatel he had been saving for an emergency. At 7:30 the Sports Arena area was eerily quiet, and except for the dark limousine parked a few yards away neither another vehicle nor a pedestrian was in sight.

The front door of the arena now opened and four men came out. Fairchild blinked when he saw that the

first was Henry Kissinger, carrying a small valise. He blinked again when he saw that the second man, carrying a slim, blanket-wrapped figure over his shoulder, was Richard Nixon. When he saw that the last two, carrying a larger blanket-wrapped figure between them, were the President of the United States and an ape, he decided to change his brand of muscatel.

He watched the man carrying the satchel hold open the rear door of the limousine. The two blanket-draped figures were loaded inside. Richard Nixon and the ape got in back with them. Kissinger and President Carter got in front, the ex-Secretary of State driving. The doors all closed and the limousine glided off as silently as it had arrived.

Five

John Bosley was already waiting in the lobby of the Exeter Building when Kelly, Sabrina and Kris arrived at five minutes to eleven. They took an elevator to the sixteenth floor, and Bosley led them along a corridor to a door lettered "MAX BROWN ENTERPRISES." They entered a large, plushly furnished and empty waiting room.

The sound of their entrance brought a man to the door of a private office off the waiting room. He was a squarely built, balding man in his mid-fifties, and was obviously in a great state of agitation.

"You from Charlie Townsend, I hope?" he said to Bosley. Then he looked at the three girls. "What's this? You carry around your own chorus line?"

"I'm John Bosley, and these are some of Charlie's agents," Bosley said. He indicated the girls in turn. "Sabrina Duncan, Kelly Garrett and Kris Munroe."

"Female agents?" the man said, frustratedly running fingers through what was left of his hair. "I ain't got enough troubles." Then he said with a touch of apology, "Sorry. I just got some upsetting news. I'm Max Brown."

Bosley and the girls murmured polite acknowledgments. Max Brown ushered them into his private office and closed the door.

"There's no receptionist because I sent her off to early lunch," he explained. "Didn't want her to hear the bad news. If it leaks to the press, my opening night will be ruined."

"What bad news is that?" Bosley asked.

"My two lead skaters are gone. Disappeared like Judge Crater. Never changed back into their street clothes after working out at the arena early this morning. They sent a flunky named Billy Brinks out for coffee, like they do every morning after their workout. When he got back, they were gone. Poof! No trace, no word from them, nothing."

"Hmm," Bosley said. "Perhaps we had better relay this on to Charlie."

"Be my guest," Brown said, waving toward a speaker-phone on his desk similar to the one in Bosley's office. Then he gestured toward chairs and said apologetically to the angels, "Girls, excuse my manners, but I'm going crazy. Sit down."

The angels took seats in various parts of the room. Brown nervously weaved in and out among them, pacing, as Bosley dialed Charlie Townsend's number. There was a dish of nuts on the desk, and Bosley's hand automatically dipped into it after dialing.

When the private investigator answered, Bosley said, "We're at Max Brown's office, Charlie, and there's been a complication. His two lead skaters have disappeared."

"Jack Ward and Helene Robinson?" Charlie's cultured voice asked.

Bosley gave Brown an inquiring look. At the same time he tossed another handful of nuts into his mouth.

"Yes, Jack and Helene," Max said. "Charlie, what

is this? I call you for help, and what do I end up with? Three cheerleaders and a man who inhales nuts."

Bosley, reaching for the nut dish a third time, hurriedly withdrew his hand.

Charlie's voice said, "They'll help, Max. Trust me."

Walking around the office, in and out among the chairs of the angels, Max muttered aloud, "'Trust me,' he says. First somebody breaks into my office. Now my two lead skaters are gone. Vanished. In six days I officially open for the season. Opening night we're sold out. Movie stars, big oil men from the Middle East. And what do I have?" He drew a deep breath and expelled it before going on. "I'll tell you what I have. Missing stars is what I have. A show is what I have not."

"Just when did they disappear?" Sabrina asked.

"Sometime between seven-thirty and a quarter to eight this morning. Billy left them in the Training Room to go after coffee at a restaurant nearby. When he got back fifteen minutes later, they were gone. He searched the arena, but there was no sign of them. They were still in their skating clothes when Billy left them, and they hadn't changed, because their street clothes are still in their lockers—including their shoes. They had taken off their skates, and were in stocking feet. Helene's car, which they came in, is still parked on the parking lot."

"Who's Billy?" Kelly asked.

"Billy? He's a—our gopher, our flunky. Nice fella, good strong back." He touched his temple. "Above the neck, not so strong. Anyway, Billy says Jack and Helene have been having a little hanky-panky, if you know what I mean."

"Jack and Helene," Kris said. "Are they married?"

"Jack, yes. Helene, no—if you get my drift, young lady."

"Have you checked with Jack's wife?" Kelly asked.

Max threw up his hands. "Charlie, please tell these ladies that I'm not just another pretty face. Of course I checked with his wife. She doesn't know *where* he's at."

"You've checked where Helene lives?" Sabrina inquired.

"I called," Max said. "There's no answer."

"Why don't you call the police?" Kris said.

Max glared at her. "Maybe I should call the newspapers too, and tell the ticket-buying public that my stars are missing." He turned toward the phone-speaker with a beseeching expression on his face. "Charlie, are you sure these people can help me?"

"Trust me, Max. Find out why they're missing, angels."

Kris said, "Charlie, what is that popping noise?"

"A pong game, angel."

"Pong? You mean Ping-Pong?"

"Just 'pong' in this case, Kris."

Charlie smiled at the beautiful young woman across the room who was batting a Ping-Pong ball at an electronically controlled backstop that automatically returned each drive.

"Good hunting, angels," he said, and hung up.

As Bosley hung up Max Brown's phone, the entrepreneur said in a tone of frustration. "'Trust him,' he says. So what choice do I have? You going to find my stars?"

"The girls will find them," Bosley assured him. "Of course we'll have to have your cooperation."

Max stopped pacing to wave his arms. "I'll cooperate, I'll cooperate. Just ask me!"

"To start," Bosley said, "suppose we work a couple of the girls into your show?"

Max gazed at him. "Why?"

"I thought that was obvious," Bosley said. "So they can pump the cast for whatever they know about Jack Ward and Helene Robinson."

After thinking about this, Max nodded. Regarding the angels hopefully, he asked, "You girls skate?"

"I roller-skate," Sabrina said brightly.

After momentarily closing his eyes, Max decided to ignore her. "How about you two?" he asked Kelly and Kris.

"I was a pretty good ice skater as a kid," Kelly replied.

"Well, that ain't too long ago," Max said gallantly. "You figure-skate?"

"I can do a figure eight."

Max looked less hopeful. Turning to Kris, he asked, "You any good?"

"I can do a figure eight too."

"So, as replacements for my stars I get two amateurs who can do figure eights," Max growled, again waving his arms at Bosley. "Twenty thousand people are going to pay to see that? Anybody can watch kids doing figure eights on a frozen pond, for nothing."

"There aren't any frozen ponds around here," Kris pointed out.

Regarding her sourly, Max turned to Bosley. "It's a lousy idea."

"I'm not suggesting that you actually put them in your opening-night performance," Bosley said. "You'll just announce that they're going to be in the show, so that they'll have an excuse to be at rehearsals. Hopefully we'll have your stars back to you before opening night."

Max looked somewhat relieved. "Okay, providing Alvin accepts them."

"Alvin?" Kelly asked.

"Alvin Queen, the show's director. He's a chipmunk, but he runs the show."

Kris asked, "When's the next rehearsal?"

"Three o'clock this afternoon."

"Maybe if Kelly and I got in a little practice before rehearsal, we could convince Alvin we're professionals."

Max nodded. "I'll phone Paul Boyer to let you in the Sports Arena. He's the building guard." He glanced at his watch. "He doesn't come on duty until noon, because usually the place is deserted before that. They just keep it locked up."

"I thought your two stars and Billy Brinks were there early this morning," Sabrina said.

"They issued us two keys so Jack and Helene could

get in their early-morning practice," Max explained. "Jack had one, Billy has the other. Helene didn't need one, because she and Jack always arrived there together."

"Suppose you phone the guard that we'll be there at twelve-thirty?" Kelly said. "That'll give Kris and me time to grab a little lunch."

"I'll have to shop for some skates too," Kris said. "I imagine it would be difficult to convince the director we were professional skaters if we showed up without skates and had to borrow some."

"Good god yes!" Max said. "Alvin wouldn't even talk to you. The shoes got to be white." He looked at Kelly. "You got skates?"

"Somewhere in storage. It might take hours to find them. I'll buy new ones too."

"Can you arrange for the building guard to let me in too?" Sabrina asked.

Max frowned at her. "There's no roller skaters in the act."

"Oh, I won't be arriving with Kris and Kelly," Sabrina told him. "Tell him . . ." She thought for a moment. "Tell him I'm your secretary and you're sending me to pick up some papers you left in the Training Room."

"Can you type?" Max asked, then realized that was a silly question and said, "Scratch that."

"As a matter of fact I can," Sabrina said. "Ninety words a minute."

Six

Los Angeles is a strange city in a number of ways, but one of its strangest characteristics is that it has the larger part of a mountain range lying within its forty-mile-square city limits. The Santa Monica Mountains is not a large range, and has no towering peaks, but it is pretty wild and rugged. One ten-mile section edged by Mulholland Drive is virtually uninhabited, despite being geographically near the center of the city.

In a box canyon off that unpaved, and seldom-traveled section of Mulholland Drive, the scar-faced Kalik and the mustachioed Durgas had set up a firing range, the targets being a half-dozen watermelons set on posts. The two stood beside the black limousine with the diplomatic plates, watching a young man and a young woman position themselves on the firing line, fifty yards from the targets. Both young people were tall, wiry and athletic-looking, with dark, Slavic features. Their weapons were thirty-caliber repeating rifles, held at trail position.

"Now!" Kalik commanded.

The butt plates of the two rifle stocks slammed against shoulders and each fired three rounds, so rapidly that it sounded like short bursts from automatic weapons. Obviously the bullets were dumdums, because the six watermelons shattered into small pieces.

Kalik walked over to the posts, picked up a couple of pieces of melon that had not fallen to the ground, and returned eating one. Durgas walked over to meet him in front of the young couple.

Showing a stopwatch to Kalik, Durgas said, "They can destroy six traitors in one-point-six seconds."

Peering at the watch for confirmation, Kalik nodded approvingly, then handed the mustachioed man the second piece of melon. He said to the young man, "You shoot very well at melons, Luisi. Can you do as well with people?"

"Why do you ask me, instead of Olga?" Luisi countered with a tinge of resentment. "Women are supposed to be the squeamish ones."

Finishing the piece of melon, the scar-faced man tossed aside the rind. "The female of the species is more deadly than the male," he quoted. "At least according to Rudyard Kipling. I don't know if that's true in general, but I do know it is in this case, because I've had some long talks with Olga. *You're* the only one I'm worried about."

"Why don't you get someone else?" Luisi asked sardonically. "There must be lots of hit men who are also top professional skaters."

"I'm appreciative of your unique qualifications," Kalik said without smiling, "and that we have no choice but to use you. But when the time comes, will you be able to kill?"

"Do not worry about Luisi," Olga said. "We will both do as you want, provided . . ."

"Provided what?" Durgas asked when she let her words trail off. He also tossed aside his melon rind.

"Provided you pay as you promised, and get us safely out of there afterward."

"You will be paid," Kalik assured her. "And your escape car will be waiting by the side exit to the parking lot. You merely have to skate to Tunnel 3 as soon as the job is done, run along it on your skates, out the exit and jump into the car."

"Then we guarantee you six dead men," Luisi said.

Seven

The entrance to the Sports Arena was closed and locked when Kris and Kelly arrived at 12:30, each carrying a small leather bag containing skates and skating outfits. Kelly pressed a bell, which brought a thin, short man in a gray uniform to the door.

"You're Paul Boyer?" Kelly asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I'm Kelly Garrett and this is Kris Munroe."

"Oh, yes. Mr. Brown phoned about you."

He stepped aside to let them in, then closed and relocked the door behind them. "People come in off the street and hide in the restrooms until show time if we don't keep the building locked up tight," he explained. "Follow me and I'll show you the locker room."

He led them from the lobby into the main corridor and turned left to the first tunnel leading to the rink. The last door was lettered "Locker Room—Employees Only." It led into a long, narrow room with nothing in it but a double tier of suitcase-sized lockers along the rear wall. To the left were two doors respectively labeled "Women" and "Men." To the right was an unmarked door that gave onto the skating rink.

"The stars get full-sized lockers over in the Training Room," Boyer said. "But the hoi polloi has to put up with these dinky little ones."

He unlocked two padlocks on upper-tier lockers with a master key, opened the doors and pointed to keys lying on the bottoms of the lockers. "These'll be your personal lockers, long as you're performing here."

When you leave, just put the key back in the locker and snap the lock closed."

Kelly and Kris both thanked him.

Pointing to the door labeled "Women," he said, unnecessarily, "You change in there."

The two girls thanked him again, and he left.

Kris and Kelly, who were both wearing pantsuits, carried their bags into the women's room to change into their skating skirts and blouses. Then, locking their street clothing and their purses in their lockers, they put on their new skates and exited onto the rink through the door at the right side of the room.

For a few minutes the girls merely skated around the rink, regaining the feel of being on ice after a long period of not skating. When they had gained a little confidence, both executed graceful figure eights. Then Kelly tried a spin, lost her balance and landed on her bottom.

"Ouch!" she said. "Ice hasn't gotten any softer since I was a kid."

Helping her to her feet, Kris said with a grin, "Maybe we better both stick to figure eights."

They practiced for a half-hour, both gradually gaining confidence. Then Kris decided she had had enough for her first time, and headed for the locker room. Kelly, a little rustier than Kris, elected to get in a little more practice.

Opening the door from the rink into the locker room, Kris went in on the toes of her skates. She came to a halt at the sight of a woman methodically going through one of the lockers, a plain-looking woman in her mid-thirties with a veneer of "Who cares?" that impressed Kris as barely covering an internal rage. She wore a dowdy, rose-colored dress, and her somewhat dumpy figure made it unlikely that she was one of the skaters. Also, the manner in which she was examining the contents of the locker made it seem equally unlikely that it was hers. But if she was a thief, she was a remarkably cool one. Paying no attention whatever to Kris, she went right on rifling the locker.

Since she could hardly just ask the woman bluntly if she were a thief, Kris tried, "You with the ice show?"

The woman threw her a casual look. "The only ice I want to see is at the bottom of a glass," she said sourly.

Kris tried again. "I'm Kris Munroe," she said brightly.

Without looking at her, the woman said, "Shirley Ward."

"Jack Ward's wife?" Kris asked.

"He's my so-called husband," the woman admitted. "This is his locker."

"I thought his locker was in the Training Room," Kris said in surprise.

"Superstars get two lockers," Shirley said sardonically. "I already checked the other and drew zilch."

"I guess he *is* a superstar," Kris said. "I hear he's a terrific skater."

"Skater ten, husband zero!" Shirley slammed the locker and clicked the padlock shut. "Damn!"

"Lose something?" Kris asked.

"Yeah. Him and the keys to the Chevy."

Kris had a sudden idea. "Listen, I've got to go downtown. I could drive you to a locksmith."

Shirley gave her a wondering look, then shrugged. "Might as well. I got a feeling he ain't coming back."

In an innocent voice Kris asked, "You mean he's disappeared?"

"That's what I mean, honey."

"You must be real broken up," Kris said with sympathy.

"I'm devastated," Shirley said in a bored tone.

Kris quickly unlocked her locker, took out her street clothing and purse and headed for the woman's room.

"I'll only be a jiffy," she said. "Mind waiting?"

Shrugging again, Shirley said, "Otherwise I walk."

Kris had just finished dressing when Kelly came in to the woman's dressing room carrying her street clothes, shoes and purse. "Who's the frump outside?"

Kelly asked as she started to unlace her skate shoes.

"Jack Ward's wife, Shirley. Seems he took off with the keys to the family car. We're going to drive her to a locksmith."

"We?"

"Well, we came in your car. It wouldn't be very nice for me to leave you stranded here while I took it."

Kelly arched an eyebrow at her. "You're such a considerate thing. Why are we being such good Samaritans?"

"I thought that afterward we might steer her to a bar. I don't think that'll be a problem."

Kelly wiped her skate blades with a paper towel and slipped out of her skating skirt. "She looks as though she wouldn't turn down a drink," she agreed. "But don't forget, we have rehearsal at three."

"It's only a little after one," Kris said. "We'll make it."

Kris went out to the locker room and put her skates and skating outfit in her locker. "We have to wait for my friend," she told Shirley Ward. "She'll only be a minute."

The woman shrugged. "What I got most of is time."

When Kelly appeared, moments later, Kris introduced her to Shirley; then the three of them left. Paul Boyer let them out, and locked the door behind them.

As they pulled off the parking lot in Kelly's Cobra, Kris asked Shirley if she had any particular locksmith in mind.

"They all charge an arm and a leg, I imagine," the woman said with indifference.

"There's one on Broadway near Bullocks," Kelly said.

"Good as any," Shirley responded dully.

They were at the locksmith's only long enough for Shirley to give the license number and description of the car, tell where it was parked and sign a permission slip for the locksmith to show the police in case he was questioned. When they left there, Kris and

Kelly took her to a bar across the street from Pershing Square, where Shirley managed to get maudlin drunk in less than an hour.

Mindful of their skating rehearsal at three, Kris and Kelly drank only horse's necks, the soft drink disguised to look as though it was some kind of alcoholic concoction. They got no information from the woman that gave any clue as to what might have happened to her husband and Helene Robinson, but they did garner two bits of interesting information. One was that Shirley had long since resigned herself to Jack Ward's playing around with other women, so that his current affair with his co-star didn't particularly bother her. The other—if she was telling the truth—was that despite his philandering, Ward had a strong need for his wife; so strong, according to Shirley, that there was no possibility of his having run off with Helene.

"It's like he's a little boy and I'm his mother," she explained thickly. "He'd fall apart if I suddenly wasn't there. Jackie-baby always comes to Mama."

At two P.M., Kris and Kelly decided they had better break up the party. Shirley refused Kelly's offer of a ride home, preferring to stay and have a few more drinks.

Kelly had parked her Cobra in the underground lot beneath Pershing Square. As they pulled out of the tunnel onto the street, the car's phone buzzed. Kris answered.

"Kris Munroe," she said.

Charlie Townsend's voice said in her ear, "I've been trying to reach you girls for an hour. Paul Boyer said you and Kelly left the arena with Shirley Ward."

"Yes," Kris said. "We've been plying her with booze and pumping her. Want to hear about it?"

"Not now. Where are you?"

"Near Pershing Square."

"Good," Charlie said. "Then you're not far from the Exeter Building. You can make your report at the meeting in Max's office."

"You mean now?" Kris asked.

"Now," Charlie confirmed.

"Charlie, we have rehearsal at three o'clock."

"This won't take long, angel," Charlie said. "You'll make it." He cut off further protest by hanging up.

"Head for the Exeter Building," Kris said to Kelly as she hung up the phone. "The master has called a meeting in Max Brown's office."

Eight

Sabrina arrived at the Sports Arena about five minutes after Kris and Kelly had departed with Shirley Ward. When Paul Boyer opened the door, she gave him a wide smile and said, "I'm Sabrina Duncan."

"Oh, yes," the security guard said. "Mr. Brown's secretary. He phoned to expect you. The papers you want are in the Training Room?"

In order to give herself an excuse to nose around generally, Sabrina said, "He *thinks* that's where he left them. I'll check there first. My employer is a nice man, but he's not very well organized."

The guard led her from the lobby into the main corridor, then to the right to the second tunnel leading to the rink. As they got close enough to the Training Room for Sabrina to see the lettering on the door, and the guard seemed intent on staying right with her, she decided on a ruse to get rid of him.

Halting in front of the closed door, Sabrina said, "It would be just like the boss to leave those papers in the men's room instead of here. And I can't very well check there. Would you do me a favor of looking there while I check the Training Room?"

"Sure," Boyer said.

"They'll be in a large manila envelope with 'Max Brown Enterprises' typed on it," Sabrina told him.

Nodding, he turned and walked back the way they had come.

Inside the Training Room, Billy had his locker door open and was gazing at a publicity photo of Helene Robinson that was Scotch-taped to the inside of the door. Lying on the shelf of the locker was the sheaf of currency he had received from the occupants of the black limousine.

"They said they wouldn't touch you," Billy said to the photograph in an agonized voice. "They promised me. But they lied. You gotta believe me, it wasn't my fault!"

At the sound of the door opening, Billy slammed the locker door.

But it didn't catch. It bounced back to stand ajar about three inches. Billy didn't notice, because his attention was riveted on the woman who entered the room. She was tall, beautiful and regal in appearance. She also looked extremely efficient, as if she might be an efficiency expert. She was dressed rather severely in a tan suit with a skirt that reached below the knees.

Ignoring Billy, the woman made a tour of the room, taking mental inventory of its equipment. Billy watched in confusion, wondering if he should challenge her presence here. She took the initiative away from him by suddenly spinning to face him.

"Is this it?" she asked in a tone of disapproval.

"What?" Billy said, totally at sea.

"No whirlpool? No electrotherapy? What kind of Training Room is this?"

Rattled, Billy said, "Well . . . the show travels a lot."

The woman nodded approval. "Very astute. It isn't economically feasible to have them when you travel. And you?"

"Me what?" Billy asked.

"Obviously you're one of the key figures in this operation. Your name?"

Billy wasn't flattered. He was merely astonished that anyone would think him a key figure in anything. The woman's poor judgment made him faintly suspicious of her.

"Billy Brinks," he said. "But everybody calls me just Billy."

"Good, Billy. We'll need people who know how to run a show from backstage, if you know what I mean."

Billy frowned, not understanding a word she had said. A bit uncertainly, he inquired, "Lady, you ain't supposed to be in here."

"Of course I am, Billy," the woman said with an elegant air. "I'm Sabrina Duncan. I represent a conglomerate who'll probably buy this show—lock, stock and barrel—from Max Brown. And that includes the personnel. But don't worry, Billy. You'll have a job with us."

Billy understood that. He might be changing bosses. "Oh, thank you," he said.

The woman said briskly, "It's usually people like you who know the true facts. Now tell me, the girl who disappeared. Helene— What's her last name?"

An agonized expression formed on Billy's face. "Robinson. Helene Robinson. She was the best."

"Was?"

"Is!" he hurriedly changed it.

"Hmm. And Jack Ward?"

"He's a bum!" Billy said with feeling. "No good."

The woman arched an eyebrow. "Interesting point of view."

Billy's head began to throb. He didn't like these questions about Helene and Jack Ward, particularly about Helene. "You don't belong in here," he said, moving forward to reach for her arm and usher her out.

Casually avoiding his grasp, she started moving about the room again, checking things. Without looking at him, she said, "I understand Helene just—disappeared. That's not very professional, is it?"

"It's their fault," Billy said agitatedly. "She wasn't supposed—"

Abruptly he broke it off, appalled at his near slip of

the tongue. The woman spun to fix him with her regal gaze.

"Wasn't supposed to what?"

"Nothing," Billy said.

"Whose fault, Billy? What were you trying to say?"

Billy took refuge in the same old refrain. "Lady, you ain't supposed to be here."

He moved toward her with the evident intention of bodily ejecting her. She moved around behind a training table.

"If I'm to evaluate things," she said, "I have to understand the odd disappearance of our stars. Do you think they simply ran off together?"

"Don't say nothing bad about Helene," Billy almost shouted.

Suddenly enraged, he gripped the training table between them and sent it hurtling across the room to crash into a wall. He did this not to get it out of the way so that he could reach his tormenter, but it was merely an expression of rage. Nevertheless, Sabrina backed farther from him, toward the lockers.

"I wouldn't dream of it," she said soothingly.

All at once, Billy saw that his locker door was ajar and the money on the shelf was plainly visible. The expression of horror on his face made the woman turn to see what he was gazing at. There was no way she could have avoided seeing the money, he realized.

Sabrina slipped aside, placing the other training table between them as Billy lumbered forward to slam the locker door and snap closed the padlock.

"Good," the woman said brightly. "Lock everything up nice and neat. A place for everything and everything in its place. Listen, would you care to explain your relationship with Helene Robinson?"

Billy grabbed the second training table and sent it hurtling across the room to crash into the wall. This time it wasn't merely an expression of rage. He was removing it as a barrier. He reached for her with outstretched hands.

"I don't want to talk about that," he bawled. "You understand?"

Nodding, the woman skipped to the door and pulled it open. Billy didn't follow. Lowering his arms, he stood panting like a huge, out-of-control bear.

"Got it," Sabrina said. "Well, it's been very informative."

She backed from the room and pulled the door closed behind her.

Billy continued to gaze at the closed door for a time, then waddled over to grab one of the training tables and get rid of some of his frustration by crashing it into the lockers.

The short, thin security guard was coming along the tunnel as Sabrina closed the Training Room door behind her. As he neared her, he said, "It wasn't in the men's room. You have a phone call. Did you find it in there?"

"Thanks, yes," she said in response to his last two sentences.

Boyer directed her to the box office off the lobby and pointed to a phone off its hook.

Lifting it, Sabrina said, "Hello?"

"Calling a meeting at Max Brown's office, angel," a familiar voice said in her ear. "Hope I'm not interrupting anything important."

"I just finished everything I could do here at the moment, Charlie. Right away?"

"Right away," he confirmed. "See you there."

"See me?" Sabrina said with interest.

"Hear you," Charlie amended. "That was just a figure of speech."

"What I thought," Sabrina said with a sigh. "Are we ever going to see you, Charlie?"

"Maybe someday, angel. Perhaps at your retirement banquet, when you get your gold watches. Meantime, get over to the Exeter Building."

There came the click of his hanging up.

Nine

The long one-story building had boarded-up windows and a For Sale sign next to its front door listing the phone number of a real-estate company. The weather-beaten state of the sign indicated it had been for sale for some time. The place was once a paint factory, had gone bankrupt, and the machinery had all been sold off. The huge rooms were empty.

Kalik and his associates had gained entrance by using bolt cutters on the padlock of the truck entrance at the rear of the building. They had similarly cut away the lock on the door of the factory storeroom. Then they had installed their own locks.

Kalik and Durgas were seated on boxes in what had once been the factory office, when the gold-toothed Grout and the man with the bashed-in nose named Faud came in carrying a half-dozen Mexican dinners wrapped in foil and a six-pack of beer.

"Where's the wine?" Kalik asked.

"The restaurant sold only beer," Grout said. "We were afraid if we stopped somewhere else for wine, the food would get cold."

Grunting, Kalik removed two cans of beer from the carton, set them on a box and placed two of the dinners next to them. He pulled on his Kissinger mask and Durgas put on his Jimmy Carter mask. Kalik then picked up the two dinners and left the office. Durgas followed, carrying the two cans of beer.

They crossed the main room of the ex-factory to a large sliding door of corrugated iron. Kalik unlocked the door's padlock. Durgas, holding the two beer cans

in one hand, drew a .45 automatic. Kalik slid open the door.

The storeroom was huge, with a fifteen-foot ceiling. It was windowless, its only ventilation being a skylight in the ceiling, cracked open a couple of inches.

There were no furnishings in the room, but it contained a pile of paint-spattered ten-by-eight pieces of lumber about three feet high. Helene Robinson and Jack Ward were seated desolately on the lumber, still in their skating tights and shoeless. Although it was warm in the room, Helene had an old piece of tarp wrapped around her shoulders. She was breathing heavily and looked ill.

As the two masked men set the food and the beer next to them on the pile of lumber, Helene said in a wheezing voice, "Please, did you think about what I asked?"

The masked men headed for the door without answering.

"Wait!" Ward said urgently. "We weren't kidding. She's got asthma. She needs those pills!"

Kalik and Durgas paused in the doorway to look at each other. Ward, sensing that he had them thinking about it, said eagerly, "Look, whatever you have in mind, it doesn't include killing us, or you'd have done it by now. Please, the pills are in a bottle in her purse in her locker in the training room."

The man in the Kissinger mask said gutturally, "We can't go back there."

"There's some at my apartment, too," Helene said. "In the top drawer of the dresser in my bedroom. You can't miss them. A small brown bottle."

Ward rose to his feet and ran over to grab the man in the Kissinger mask by the shoulders. "You can't just let her die!"

Kalik shoved Ward aside and went out into the main room. When the skater tried to follow him, the man in the Jimmy Carter mask waved his gun threateningly. Ward backed away as the man went out and slid the door closed. Helene and Jack could hear the padlock being snapped back in place.

Kalik and Durgas took off their masks and Durgas put away his gun. The two men looked at each other thoughtfully, both thinking of what Jack Ward had said.

Finally the mustachioed Durgas said, "We're here to kill the traitors. If someone else dies, it will look bad for us. Maybe we should go to the apartment and get her medication."

"First things first," Kalik said. "Our lunches will be getting cold. Then we must take care of the guard at the arena."

Ten

When Kris and Kelly arrived at Max Brown's office, Sabrina and Bosley were already there. Max, as usual, was pacing. Bosley sat behind the desk, and Sabrina had the center chair of three before the desk. The phone was off the hook and Bosley was already in conversation with Charlie Townsend.

"Here they are now," Bosley said as the two girls entered the room.

"You made good time, angels," Charlie's voice said.

"When you call, sire, we rush," Kelly said.

"I'm touched," Charlie said dryly.

Waving his arms, Max interrupted. "Small talk while my life crumbles in ruins!"

Smiling at him, Kris and Kelly seated themselves either side of Sabrina.

Bosley said to the two new arrivals, "Sabrina has already made her report. To recap it, she found Billy Brinks in the Training Room at the arena. As she came in, Billy slammed a locker door, but it bounced partially open again, enough for her to see in. There

was a stack of currency on the locker shelf. When Sabrina began questioning him about Jack Ward and Helene Robinson, he became quite upset and blurted something about the skaters' disappearance being 'their' fault. He started to say something to the effect that Helene wasn't supposed to have done something, but cut it off and refused to talk about her anymore. The only other thing Sabrina got out of him was the impression that he had a puppy-love crush on Helene, but hated Jack Ward's guts."

"Admirably abbreviated, Bosley," Charlie said. "Now what do you have to report, Kris and Kelly?"

Kelly said, "We took Shirley Ward to a bar and got her drunk. We don't think she knows what happened to her husband and Helene, but she's convinced they didn't just run off to some motel for a little hanky-panky. Kris and I are inclined to go along with that. If they're just goofing off together, it seems strange they couldn't wait to change into their street clothes, and didn't even bother to put on their shoes."

"You mean they were snatched?" Max asked. "I'll maybe be getting a ransom note?"

"It has to be considered as a possibility, Max," Charlie's voice said.

Weaving in and out among the angels, Max clutched at his thinning hair. "A hundred thousand they'll ask, maybe? I'm dead. Where would I get a hundred thousand?"

"You could withdraw it from one of your bank accounts," Charlie said dryly. "Or take it from one of your safe-deposit boxes. But let's not jump to conclusions. I merely said kidnapping has to be considered as a possibility. Admittedly, in the light of Sabrina's report on Billy Brinks, it seems a strong one. The money she saw could mean he was paid to cooperate."

"He always keeps his money in his locker," Max said. "He hardly ever spends any, so he accumulates it. I have to pay him the minimum wage of two-fifty-an-hour, you know, even though he does practically nothing. Probably what she saw was all ones."

"Listen," Sabrina said, "I'm telling you Billy knows

more than he's saying. He almost spilled it. And when I pressed him, he got a little dangerous."

Max paused in his pacing to wave his arms in her direction. "Please, my Billy's a pussycat. You just pushed the wrong button."

Charlie's voice said, "I ran a record check on Billy Brinks, Max. Your pussycat has a record of assault and battery."

Max faced the phone speaker with his arms outspread. "All right, so a long time ago he was a little short-tempered. But, believe me, he is not responsible for Helene's disappearance. You heard what Sabrina said. He loves her. I've known that for a long time."

"A lot of strange things happen in the name of love," Charlie said. "I think you'd better check her apartment, Sabrina."

"Good idea, Charlie," Sabrina said.

"Check her apartment for what?" Bosley asked. "What will you look for?"

"I'll try to figure out if she was abducted, or went away for a weekend of play."

"Kelly and I don't think it was romance," Kris said. "As Shirley said after her third drink, 'Jackie-baby always comes home to Mama.' And this time he didn't. I vote for foul play."

"So do I," Kelly said.

Throwing up his arms, Max exclaimed, "The children are voting! My life is at stake, and they're having a democratic election. When come results?"

Laughing at him, Kelly said, "Soon, Max, soon. Meantime it's pushing three o'clock. Charlie, you said we'd get away from here in time to make rehearsal."

"You have fifteen minutes, Kelly. And the meeting is adjourned."

Kelly and Kris got to their feet. "Okay, Max," Kelly said, "let's hit the ice."

"Me?" Max said in astonishment. "I never been on skates in my life."

"You have to introduce us to the director," Kelly explained patiently. "We can't just walk in cold. He'd never hire us without pressure from you."

"I got no influence over Alvin," Max said. "I pay his salary, but he gives me never-minds. Nobody pays any attention to me. I just shell out the money, and they do as they please. It's the union. Ask some employee to do something, and he tells you to kiss off. Try to fire him, and the steward gets on your back."

"Max," Kris said, "at least you know Alvin. We don't. Are you going to introduce us?"

"Sure," Max said. "What are we waiting for? Let's get going."

Eleven

When Kris, Kelly and Max arrived at the Sports Arena, the Ice Follies cast was already on the ice, going through a routine. Kris and Kelly hurried to the locker room to change into their skates and skating outfits.

When they came out onto the ice from the door facing the rink, Max was standing at the end of the tunnel next to the door, just off the ice. The girls skated over to him.

"We're in luck," Max said. "Alvin's hung up and won't be here until four. The assistant director can show you some of the movements before Alvin gets here, and maybe you'll pass when you audition for Alvin."

"Who's the assistant director?" Kris asked.

"Gregg Alger. He's not temperamental like Alvin. He'll show you the ropes without tearing his hair out every time you make a mistake." Raising his voice, he yelled, "Hey, Gregg!"

A muscular young man with a square, pleasant face and a crewcut skated over. "What's with Jack and

Helene?" he asked. "They've never been late before."

"Maybe they're with Alvin," Max said, evading the issue. "I want you to meet a couple of new skaters. Kris Munroe and Kelly Garrett. Gregg Alger, girls, the assistant director."

When the three had exchanged greetings, Max went on. "I'd like them worked into the show, but of course that's up to Alvin. I thought maybe you could show them enough stuff before Alvin gets here to make them pass muster."

"Sure," Gregg Alger said. "Let's get over in a corner where we can work out without interruption."

He skated off, and Kris and Kelly followed him.

For the next half-hour the girls worked under the tutelage of the assistant director. Because both were naturally graceful and well-coordinated, some of the turns and moves they mastered quickly. But because they were rusty at ice-skating, and had never been pros anyway, the more complicated maneuvers baffled them. They each had a number of slips and falls. They were amazingly equal in both their skills and lack of skill. The movements which they conquered, they conquered in unison. When one slipped and fell, the other invariably joined her seated on the ice.

Fortunately Gregg Alger was a patient teacher. After each fall, he waited without comment for the girls to climb to their feet, then had them repeat whatever maneuver had sprawled them on the ice.

At the end of a half-hour Kris panted, "Can we take a break?"

"Alvin will be here in less than a half-hour," Alger said. "You want to pass the audition?"

"We'll never pass it if we're dead when he gets here," Kris told him. "And I'm going to drop over any minute now."

"Okay," Alger consented. "Three minutes."

The girls skated over to where Max still stood at the edge of the tunnel. The entrepreneur gave his head a sorrowful shake.

"Alvin will never buy it," he said. "He'll never buy you two as skaters."

When Kelly stopped panting, she said. "I thought Alvin was a 'chipmunk.' "

"Chipmunk, shipmunk. This chipmunk is the director of the show. Without Alvin, no show. I'll have to tell him who you are."

Kris caught her breath enough to say, "Can't do that, Max. Can't risk blowing our cover."

"We can't risk *not* telling him," Max said. "What good's your cover if you're not on the ice? And I'm telling you, he'll never buy you otherwise. He probably won't anyway, but he just might in order to find out what happened to his stars."

Then Max clapped his forehead.

"What's the matter?" Kelly asked.

"I'm going to have to break it to him that six days before opening night, he's got no stars. He'll go off like a Roman candle."

"I thought you wanted to keep their disappearance a secret," Kris said.

"From the papers, sure. How can I keep it from the director? He'll see they ain't here. What do I tell him? That I gave them vacations in the middle of rehearsals?"

"I guess you'll have to level with him on that," Kelly said, "and hope he keeps it to himself. But don't tell him about us. For all we know, *he* may be behind the disappearance."

"Alvin?" Max said, shocked. "Why would he want to ruin his own show?"

"He probably wouldn't," Kris said. "But even if he's pure as the driven snow, he may have a big mouth. And if everybody in the cast knows we're plants, there's no point in us being here—because nobody will tell us a thing."

"Gregg's signaling for us to come back on the ice," Kelly said. "Come on, let's work on our turns."

"It can't be three minutes yet," Kris complained. "I'm still exhausted."

"Tell that to Alvin when he gets here," Kelly said. Raising her voice, she called, "Okay, Gregg, we're coming."

She skated off, and Kris skated after her. As Kris came up alongside of the older girl, she muttered, "My luck. Jill can skate like a pro, but I'm the one ends up with this assignment—and all the bruises."

Director Alvin Queen appeared at five minutes after four. He was a slim, wiry man of about forty with sharp features and the haughty air of an aristocrat. Although he came from the locker room on skates, he hadn't changed into a skating outfit. His street clothes were more colorful than any costume could have been, however. He wore narrow-legged slacks of reddish-purple, a dark red sport coat, and an avocado-green sport shirt with the collar outside the coat.

Raising a hand in greeting to Max as he emerged from the locker room, he began to skate toward where the cast was gathered, but stopped and returned when Max called, "Alvin!"

Halting before his employer, Alvin asked imperiously, "Yes, Max?" His tone was that of a baron deigning to speak to a serf.

"We got a problem," Max said. "Jack and Helene."

Alvin turned to scan the figures on the ice. Frowning, he asked, "Where are they?"

"That's the problem. Nobody knows. This morning after their practice session they sent Billy out for coffee, as usual. When Billy came back fifteen minutes later, they were gone. Their street clothes, including their shoes and Helene's purse, are still in their lockers."

"They left wearing their skates?" Alvin said with raised brows.

"No, they had taken them off. Looks like they left in their stocking feet. They hadn't even locked their lockers, which makes it look to me like they left real sudden."

"Under duress, you mean?" Alvin asked.

"Well, I can't imagine them not even stopping to put on their shoes if they were just heading for a motel room. Also, Billy says Helen's asthma pills are in her purse, and she needs those all the time. Even if she

was hot enough to forget her shoes, she wouldn't have forgotten her pills."

Alvin's frown deepened. "You call the police?"

"And have it all over the papers that we got no stars for opening night?"

The director gave his employer a cold look. "You think it's better to let twenty thousand people get seated before you give them the bad news?"

Max, who had expected a temper tantrum when he gave Queen the bad news, was more relieved than offended by the director's treating him as though he were a child. He said, "I thought maybe we could call the theatrical agency for understudies—without telling them Jack and Helene are missing. They been telling us we ought to have understudies anyway. If Jack and Helene show up in time to perform, we've just wasted a few bucks in additional salary. If they don't show up, we'll use the understudies."

It was probably an illusion, but Alvin seemed to swell. "I'm supposed to develop two new people into stars like Jack and Helene in six days?"

"Maybe the agency will have some top pros listed," Max said with hope.

"There aren't two skaters with Jack and Helene's talent on the entire West Coast," Alvin said flatly. "You better get on the phone to Canada and have somebody flown down."

"That would cost a fortune," Max objected. "All for nothing, if Jack and Helene show up in time to perform."

"Well, if you think I'm going to depend on what local talent the agency can dig up, you can get yourself another director. As of now."

"Don't get excited, Alvin," Max said soothingly. "I'll phone Canada."

"And hire top talent? No corner cutting?"

"Top talent," Max agreed reluctantly.

Alvin again looked out over the rink, this time more thoroughly. "Who are those two clowns Gregg is working out?" he asked.

"Kris Munroe and Kelly Garrett. I thought maybe the chorus line could use a little good looks."

"They're amateurs!" Alvin said.

"Just a little," Max replied meekly.

"Protégées of yours?" Alvin asked with withering sarcasm.

"No, I just met them today. I thought—"

"You want them, you run the show," Alvin interrupted.

"No, no," Max said hurriedly. "On the ice I back you up."

Alvin skated away without answering. Halting before the assembled cast, he said. "All right, ladies and gentlemen. In position for the first routine. Chorus people, in your places."

As the men and woman formed into a line, Kris and Kelly skated over to join them.

Glaring at them, Alvin said, "And just what do you think you're doing?"

"Getting in our places," Kris answered meekly.

"You are *not* in this chorus line," Alvin said. "Out, out, quickly!"

Intimidated, Kris and Kelly skated over to Max.

"I told you he wouldn't go for it," Max told them.

Kris and Kelly looked at each other. Kris said, "Think we can soften him up?"

"Alvin?" Kelly said with renewed determination. "Why not? He's a man, isn't he?"

Meanwhile, Max, Kris and Kelly stood watching Alvin Queen put the chorus line through its paces. No question about it, he was a topflight director. He drilled the group with the authority of a Marine drill instructor. And he was a better skater than any of them.

He demonstrated the routine he was teaching the chorus line by executing the maneuvers with his back to the performers, watching their emulation of his movements over his shoulder. Thus the men and women had an example to follow.

"Left and turn, point and stop," he chanted as he

acted out the movements he was describing. "Two, three, four and stop again."

The skaters executed the movement in perfect unison, coming to the final stop at precisely the same instant.

Alvin turned toward them, beaming. "Perfect the first time," he complimented them. "You deserve a break. Take five before we tackle the next routine."

As the chorus members skated off to the sidelines, Kris and Kelly glided over to Alvin. They moved in on either side of the director, gazing at him adoringly.

Kelly breathed, "You know, when you showed them that last turn, the way you came out of it was so beautiful, you just—"

"Oh, I love it!" Kris interrupted, leaning toward Alvin to sniff ecstatically. "Canoe, right? You're wearing Canoe. The chemistry with your skin is like a gardenia in the fall."

"Oh, really?" Alvin said, flattered. "Thank you. How nice. Listen girls, I'm sorry I can't use you in the chorus, but I'm afraid—"

Kelly stopped on the line by gushing, "You just stopped, and were so graceful. What is it that you do to make it look so—so— What is the word, Kris?"

"Organic," Kris said soulfully, batting her eyelids at him. "You could have been a ballet dancer, Alvin."

Alvin gave her a conspiratorial smile. "Don't tell anyone, but I was."

"You see!" Kris said to Kelly in triumph.

Leaning close, Kelly whispered in his ear, "You know, you're really outrageous."

"Oh?" Alvin said, intrigued.

"The way you dress. Absolutely outrageous, yet fitting your personality perfectly. Who else could get away with magenta and puce?"

"You do make it work," Kris put in. "However did you think of that combination?"

Preening himself slightly, Alvin said, "I don't let myself go to sleep until I choose the next day's outfit. I toss and turn until it's just right."

"Righteous is the word," Kelly said.

Beaming at both of them, Alvin said, "I know what you're doing, of course. Conning me into hiring you. But guess what?"

"What?" Kris and Kelly asked together in tones of disappointment.

"It worked. You are definitely not pros, but at least you bring some elegance into this world of ready-mades."

Kris bent forward to kiss him on the cheek. Kris said, "Alvin, we'll never be able to thank you."

"Probably not," the director said with a near-giggle. "But try, dears. Try." Then, turning toward the chorus skaters, Alvin raised his voice to call, "All right, boys and girls, back to the salt mines."

There were ten chorus members, five male and five female. For the previous routine Alvin had worked them as a single line. With Kris and Kelly added, he now broke it up into two lines of six. Kelly took the rear line, leaving Kris out in front, directly under Alvin's gaze.

Except for Kris and Kelly, the second routine went as smoothly as the first. They managed the first part adequately enough, but then came a difficult turn, followed by a spin. Both girls ended up seated on the ice.

In an exasperated voice, Alvin said, "Maybe I was too hasty." Then he yelled, "Gregg!" The assistant director, who was talking to Max, skated over. "Take these two amateurs over in a corner and teach them the basic movements," Alvin ordered. "Keep them at it until they learn."

Kris and Kelly, expecting to be fired, felt relief. Willingly they followed and assistant director over to the far side of the rink.

Alger worked the two girls to the point of exhaustion. By the time rehearsal ended, at seven P.M., they had improved considerably, but still were far from competent enough to skate in the chorus. When Alger finally said, "That's all for tonight," Kris and Kelly stood panting, for the moment not even having enough energy left to skate over to the locker-room door.

"I don't think you're going to make it, girls," Alger said in a kindly tone tinged with regret.

Kelly managed to control her breathing enough to say, "We've got five more days to learn. Kris and I will come down every morning and practice several hours before rehearsal."

Alger shook his head. "You'd kill yourselves. Four hours on skates is strain enough, even for pros. I've got an idea, though, that may save your jobs."

"What?" Kris asked eagerly.

"Alvin's been talking about using some clowns in the act. I'll speak to him about trying you two in those parts. If you fall down as clowns, people will think you did it on purpose. They *expect* pratfalls from clowns."

Kris and Kelly exchanged rueful looks. "There goes out show-business careers," Kelly said. "I was hoping we'd be spotted by some movie producer in the audience on opening night."

"Maybe a scout from Barnum and Bailey will be here," Kris said philosophically.

Twelve

At eight P.M. it was just turning dusk. Mason Fairchild sat on the ground next to his cardboard box, his back against the arena building, finishing off a liter of muscatel. About a half-hour earlier the cast of the ice show had trooped from the building. Now he watched blearily as the slightly built security guard, Paul Boyer, came out and locked the arena door behind him.

Out of the near-darkness the black limousine with diplomatic plates slid up to the curb, cut its lights, but left its nearly silent engine running. As the uniformed

security guard started jauntily along the sidewalk toward the parking lot, the rear window of the limousine slid down.

Fairchild couldn't see who was in the rear seat, but he distinctly heard a guttural voice call, "Hey!"

Halting, Boyer pointed a finger to himself and said, "Me?"

"Yeah," the voice of the unseen person in the rear seat of the limousine said. "Come here."

The security guard bounced his skinny frame over to the car and peered in curiously. "Yeah, what can I do for—?"

He broke it off because a pair of hands came out of each side of the window and grabbed his shoulders. He was yanked off his feet like an empty sack and was jerked headfirst through the window. His yelp of surprise was cut off by the window silently going up.

The car lights went back on and the limousine smoothly pulled away. Mason Fairchild blinked after it, wondering if what he had witnessed had actually occurred, or if the DTs were setting in. Instead of finishing the wine in the bottle, he screwed on the cap and set the bottle on the ground next to him.

The black limousine took the Harbor Freeway south. Paul Boyer cowered between two large men in the backseat, both wearing pullover rubber head masks. One had the face of Richard Nixon, the other the face of an ape. In the front seat the driver wore the face of Henry Kissinger, and his seatmate wore a Jimmy Carter mask.

"What do you want with me?" the little security guard asked fearfully. "Where are you taking me?"

"You'll know when we get there," the ape told him in a voice muffled by the mask.

They stayed on the freeway clear to its end, then drove a few blocks through the dock area and finally pulled into an alley. From this, the driver turned into a loading zone behind an abandoned factory and parked. The man in the Kissinger mask unlocked a padlock on the truck entrance and slid the corrugated-

iron door open just far enough for all of them to go inside. Boyer was escorted across a large, empty room into an office whose only furniture was some wooden boxes. A phone rested on one of the boxes.

Pointing to the phone, Henry Kissinger said in a muffled voice, "We had that put in just for you, Mr. Boyer. You are going to use it to phone the Sports Arena manager at his home."

"Mr. Meadows?" Boyer said. "He has an unlisted number. It's on file at the arena, but offhand I can't remember it."

"We can," Kissinger told him. "I'll dial it for you."

"What am I supposed to say?" the little security guard asked.

"That you're ill and won't be in to work for the next few days. But that your cousin, George Boyer, will fill in for you."

The little man stared at him. "Why should I say anything as silly as that?"

The man in the Jimmy Carter mask drew a forty-five-caliber automatic. "Because if you don't, I'm going to blow your head off," he said.

Paul Boyer gulped. "Yes, Mr. President," he said. "Whatever you say."

"We're going to let you ad lib," The man in the Kissinger mask said. "What you have to do is sell your employer on letting your cousin take over your job for the next few days. If you sell him, you're home free. If you don't, my friend with the gun will spatter your brains all over the room. Understand?"

Boyer gulped again. "Yes sir."

The ex-Secretary of State dialed a number and handed the phone to Boyer. When a feminine voice answered, the little man said, "Mrs. Meadows, this is Paul Boyer, the security guard at the arena. May I speak to Mr. Meadows, please?"

"Yes, just a minute."

A moment later a concerned male voice said, "Something's happened, Paul?"

"No sir," Boyer said. "It's just that I'm going to miss a few days' work. Got the flu. I really shouldn't have

worked today. But you don't have to worry about a replacement. My cousin, George Boyer, has agreed to take over. He used to be a security guard at Dodger Stadium, so he knows the ropes. Is it all right if I give him the key?"

"How about a uniform?" Meadows asked.

"There's all sizes in the storeroom. I'll tell him where that is."

"All right, Paul," Meadows said. "Take care of yourself."

"Yes sir," Boyer said. "Thanks, Mr. Meadows."

When he hung up, the man in the Jimmy Carter mask put away his gun and said approvingly, "You did fine. So you can keep your brains."

"You did excellently," the man in the Kissinger mask said even more approvingly. "Speaking of the key, let's have it."

He held out a palm, Boyer searched his pockets, produced the key and handed it to him.

The ape and Richard Nixon waited in the office while Henry Kissinger and the President escorted the little security guard back across the large, empty factory room to another corrugated-iron sliding door. President Carter again drew his gun, while the ex-Secretary of state unlocked the door and slid it open a couple of feet. Kissinger pushed Boyer through the door.

Boyer was startled to see the skating stars Jack Ward and Helene Robinson seated on a pile of lumber in their skating outfits and stocking feet.

As the door started to close again, Ward leaped to his feet and called, "Hey, what about the pills I asked you for?"

There was no answer, and the door slid closed. Ward looked helplessly at Helene.

Thirteen

When the meeting in Max Brown's office broke up—Max, Kris and Kelly heading for the Sports Arena and John Bosley going back to the office—Sabrina had driven to Helene Robinson's apartment building.

The skating star lived on the third floor of a six-story apartment building on Palm Avenue in Hollywood. It was a security building, with a uniformed guard on duty in the lobby. He didn't ask her who she wanted to see, but he looked her over thoroughly as she went past his desk.

There was only one elevator, and the door was just closing as Sabrina approached it. The indicator showed it was going up. Deciding not to wait, Sabrina took the stairs next to the elevator.

As she climbed upward, she was intrigued to note that each stair landing was monitored by a TV camera. *The security guard is probably watching my ascent*, she thought. It was a commentary on the times that such precautions against thieves, vandals and rapists had to be taken in a relatively quiet and respectable neighborhood.

Helene Robinson's apartment, number 311, was directly across from the elevator. When Sabrina got to the top of the stairs, she saw that the elevator stood with its door open, and that a man was trying the knob at 311. Simultaneously she noted another TV monitor at the far end of the hall, from which position everything going on in the hallway could be observed.

The man in front of Helene's door was large and dark-skinned and had a thick military mustache with

waxed ends twisted to needle points. He wore a dark suit and a matching turtleneck sweater.

Approaching him from behind, Sabrina said, "Hi. You a friend of Helene's?"

The man's body gave a startled jerk. As he turned to face her, his right hand dipped into his pocket, then reappeared again, empty. Although she hadn't seen what he deposited in his pocket, Sabrina had a feeling that it was a key.

"Just an acquaintance," the man said, looking her up and down warily.

"Oh," Sabrina said. "I'm Sabrina Duncan, one of Helene's closest friends." She waited expectantly.

He didn't respond by giving his name. "She isn't home," he said. "Or at least she doesn't answer the door."

Sabrina tried the bell. When there was no response, she tested the door and found it locked. She had a picklock set in her purse, but even if a witness had not been standing there, she couldn't very well have used it under the surveillance of the TV monitor at the end of the hall.

"What was it you wanted with Helene?" she asked.

"A personal matter," he said vaguely.

"Oh. I'll be phoning her tonight, if you want me to deliver a message."

He contemplated her moodily. Finally he said, "Tell her . . . Ramon stopped by."

His slight hesitation before the name told her he had made it up on the spur of the moment. Besides, the Latin name hardly fitted him. He looked Middle Eastern, perhaps from one of the Arab nations.

The two of them stood waiting for the other to leave, until it became a little embarrassing. Eventually Sabrina said brightly, "Well, I guess she isn't home, so there's not much point in our standing here any longer, is there?" She indicated the elevator. "We may as well catch that before someone pulls it to another floor."

He could do nothing but agree. "Yes," he said,

moving across the hallway, then courteously stepping aside for her to get in the car first.

They rode down in silence. As they emerged from the front entrance of the building together, Sabrina asked, "May I drop you somewhere, Ramon?"

"I have a car, thank you," he said.

He turned right, toward the corner. Sabrina, who had found a parking place across the street, crossed over to climb into her car. Adjusting the sideview mirror to keep him in focus, she just sat there without putting her key into the ignition. In the mirror she saw him stop at the corner and stand looking back at her. She had no choice but to get her key from her purse, start the car and drive off.

She circled the block. When she failed to spot him anywhere, she reparked in the same spot as before.

The security guard looked at her curiously when she came in the second time. This time she decided to take the elevator. All the way across the lobby she was conscious of the guard's gaze on her, even though her back was to him. She resisted the temptation to turn around until she had gotten on the car. His gaze *was* fixed on her, but he shifted it away when she looked directly at him.

When the elevator door opened at the third floor, the sound of it caused the man who called himself Ramon to swivel around and face her, his right hand again dipping into his pocket and coming out empty.

"We meet again," Sabrina said cheerily.

She moved across the hall to halt right in front of him and smile into his face. He gazed back at her in discomfort, at a loss for anything to say.

"Why don't we stop playing games?" Sabrina suggested. "Obviously you're as worried about Helene as I am, and are here to check if anything has happened to her. Have you been trying to phone her all day too?"

He nodded, jumping at this excuse for his actions. "Since early morning."

"Oh, I know where she was early this morning," Sabrina told him. "At the Sports Arena, practicing."

But she should have been home by nine at the latest. Do you think it's possible she's fainted or something, and is lying in there unconscious? Or maybe . . ."

When she let her words trail off, he said, "Or maybe dead? Let's hope not!"

"Perhaps we should look inside to see. I imagine the security guard in the lobby had a passkey."

Neither of them had noticed the elevator door close, but the sound of it opening again turned both that way. The security guard stepped from the car.

"Is there some way I can help you people?" he asked politely.

"As a matter of fact, there is," Sabrina said. "We're worried about Miss Robinson. She hasn't answered her phone all day."

"She isn't in," the guard said. "She went out early this morning and hasn't returned."

"She should have been back by nine A.M.," Sabrina told him. "You're sure she couldn't have gotten past you?"

"Quite sure."

"Oh, come," Sabrina chided him. "You never step away from that desk? As you are now, for instance?" After considering this, he said, "I suppose it's possible. One of the tenants on fourth had a minor problem about nine this morning, and I was away from the desk for a few minutes. But why are you worried about Miss Robinson?"

"We had a luncheon date and she never showed. Do you have a passkey?"

"Yes, ma'am, but I couldn't let anyone in without a police order."

"Just to look?" Sabrina said. "You'll be with us to make sure we don't touch anything."

He shook his head. "It would mean my job." Then he had a thought. "I'm authorized to enter any apartment if I have reason to believe anything's wrong. I could look, just to make sure she's not there. But you'll have to wait in the hall."

Producing a passkey, he opened the door, went in

and closed it behind him. Only moments later he reappeared.

Relocking the door from outside, he said, "The apartment is empty."

"Thanks," Sabrina said. She looked at the mustachioed man. "I guess that's that, Ramon. We may as well leave."

They rode down on the elevator with the security guard. Again they parted in front of the building, he turning right and she crossing the street. Again she adjusted the sideview mirror to watch him. This time he turned the corner without looking back.

Whatever he had wanted in Helene Robinson's apartment, he seemed to have given up getting it, at least for now. Sabrina decided to give up too. The security arrangements were just too discouraging.

At nine the next morning the three angels reported in to the Beverly Hills office. As soon as the last one was there, Bosley dialed Charlie Townsend's number, switched on the squawk box and set the phone on the desk.

"The girls are all here, Charlie," he said. "You want to talk to them?"

"I always enjoy talking to them, Bosley," Charlie's voice said. "Good morning, angels. Anything interesting to report?"

"Kris and I are in as members of the Ice Follies," Kelly said, "... although not in the chorus."

"Oh. As what?"

"Another assignment," Kelly said evasively.

In a patient voice Charlie repeated, "As what?"

When Kelly made no reply, Kris said, "Everybody's going to know eventually, Kelly. We're going to be clowns, Charlie."

After emitting a short chuckle, Charlie said, "A noble profession, angels. Certainly nothing to be ashamed of, Kelly. A namesake of yours is one of the best-known names in show business. Emmett Kelly."

"Sure," Kelly said. "But name one more famous clown."

"I'll name two. Kelly Garrett and Kris Munroe."

"Very funny, Charlie," Kris said.

"I thought it fairly amusing. Do the two of you have anything else to report?"

"We didn't have time to start pumping anyone," Kelly said. "We were kept too busy working out. We plan to get to rehearsal early this afternoon so that we can talk to some of the cast."

"How about you, Sabrina?" Charlie said. "Did you find anything at Helene's apartment?"

"I never got in, Charlie," Sabrina said. "The security setup was too good. But I ran into an interesting character who wanted into her apartment too."

"Oh?" Charlie said. "Who?"

"He said his name was Ramon. But I think he was lying. He looked like an Arab to me. Big fellow, dressed in a dark suit and a dark blue turtleneck sweater. Wore a thick mustache, waxed on the ends and twisted into sharp points."

"Sounds interesting. Where did you run into him?"

"In front of Helene's door. I think he had a key to the apartment, or maybe just a skeleton key. Which ever, he dropped it into his pocket fast as soon as I appeared on the scene. I told him I was a close friend of Helene's, and he said he was just an acquaintance. After trying to outwait each other, we finally left together. Then both of us sneaked back, and I caught him in front of her door again. This time the building security guard came after us to find out what we were up to. I gave him a story about being worried about Helene because she hadn't answered her phone all day, and he went in with his passkey to check the apartment. He wouldn't let us in, though. When he came out, he said she wasn't in there, and the two of us left."

"You didn't follow him, Sabrina?" Charlie said.

After a moment of silence, she answered, "No, Charlie. I . . . suppose I should have."

"Well, spilt milk isn't worth a tear, angel," Charlie said philosophically. "But I still want you to check out that apartment."

"Charlie, that's a full-security place. They have TV monitors watching everything that goes on."

"Sabrina," Charlie said chidingly. "Since when have sand traps stopped my angels from shooting par? Check it out."

There was a moment of silence before Sabrina spoke. "All right, Charlie. But I think I'd better wait until tonight, so that I don't run into that same security guard."

"As you please, angel. Just so you do it."

Fourteen

When Kris and Kelly arrived at the Sports Arena that afternoon, the door was opened by a different security guard than the day before. This one was large and dark-skinned and had a scar running from the corner of his left eye to the outer edge of his lips.

"What happened to Paul Boyer?" Kelly asked.

"He is ill," the new guard told her. "I am his cousin, George Boyer."

"Hi, George," Kris said. "I'm Kris Munroe and she's Kelly Garrett."

The scar-faced man looked at a clipboard he was holding and checked off their names.

"Okay," he said, stepping aside to let them in.

Kris and Kelly had arrived a half-hour before rehearsal time in order to sound out the other cast members. About half a dozen were already in the locker room by then, changing into their skates and skating outfits, and the rest of the cast had all arrived by a quarter of three.

The girls discovered that they didn't have to ask any questions; all they had to do was listen. By now

everyone in the cast knew the two stars of the show were missing, and their disappearance was the sole subject of conversation.

Opinion was pretty evenly divided between the pair having run off together and foul play. Apparently the affair between Jack Ward and Helene Robinson was no secret. But about half the cast, mostly women, discounted the possibility of an elopement for two reasons. First, they felt Helene was too dedicated to stardom to risk her career for romance. Second, they affirmed Shirley Ward's belief that while Ward was a philanderer, he would never leave his wife.

It was clear, too, from the overheard conversation that if any member of the cast possessed actual information about the disappearance, it was being kept secret.

As the cast members started out on the ice, Kris asked Gregg Alger if he had spoken to Alvin Queen about making them clowns.

"I mentioned it," the assistant director said. "He hasn't quite made up his mind yet as to whether or not to stick clowns in the act. He said to give you one more chance in the chorus line."

"Hey, maybe we'll be movie stars yet," Kelly said to Kris.

As he started to skate away, Gregg said, "Girls, you'll be lucky even to be in the cast on opening night, let alone getting the big break."

Queen, this time dressed in brilliant yellow slacks, an avocado sport coat and a purple sport shirt, was on skates at the edge of the tunnel next to the locker room, talking to Max Brown.

"You phoned Canada?" the director asked.

"Yeah, they're looking," Max said. "But I called the local agency, too, just in case they come up with something."

Frowning, Alvin said, "Waste of time. If there was anyone on the West Coast in Jack and Helene's class, we'd have heard of them."

"You could at least audition whoever they send over," Max said in a tone approaching pleading. "Who

knows, but maybe a star will be born? Or, hopefully, two."

"I'm willing to look," Alvin said. "But you keep the pressure on Canada to come up with some top skaters fast." Raising his voice, he called, "All right, boys and girls, everyone in places for the number-one routine."

About six P.M. the black limousine with diplomatic plates pulled up in front of the Sports Arena. The back door opened and a young couple of Slavic appearance stepped out, both carrying skate bags. As they closed the rear door, the window of the front one slid down. Mason Fairchild, leaning against the wall next to the entrance, saw that the driver was a dark-skinned man with a thick waxed mustache.

Leaning toward the window, the driver said, "From now on you do not know me or Kalik. Understand?"

"We understand," the young man said.

The front window of the limousine slid closed and the car made a U-turn to drive back to and onto the parking lot. The young couple went over to the entrance and the man rang the bell.

Bowing drunkenly, Mason Fairchild said, "Good day, lovely people. Are you aware that I am now borrowing money at eighteen percent per annum?"

The young man glanced at him, then looked away. The girl didn't even look at him.

"Would it be possible to negotiate a small loan on those terms?" the derelict asked.

The pair ignored him. The door was opened by the new guard.

"We are Luisi Spivak and Olga Czerniak," the young man said. "We were sent over by the talent agency to audition for parts in the Ice Follies."

"This way," the new guard said, letting them in and relocking the door from inside.

By six P.M. both Kelly and Kris were on the verge of exhaustion. Kelly had steadily improved her skating until she was executing turns and twists nearly as

expertly as the regular members of the chorus line. But Kris' technique had seemed to deteriorate as she tired.

Alvin Queen was drilling the group in the grand finale, for which he had explained that the chorus would be in the uniforms of Revolutionary War soldiers, and would carry 1776-model muskets. As the muskets were not yet available, the members merely went through the motions of raising them to their shoulders and firing the salute that ended the routine.

Queen had just called a temporary halt because Kris had stumbled and fallen, when a young couple on skates emerged from the locker room.

Both the man and the woman were tall and wiry and of Slavic appearance. They burst from the locker-room door onto the ice, skated over in fantastic form, and ended in front of Alvin in a spectacular turn and spray of ice as they came to an exact stop.

Gazing at them in mild astonishment, Alvin said, "I hope you don't mind my asking, but who the devil are you?"

"I am Olga Czerniak," the girl said. She pointed a thumb at her companion. "This is Luisi Spivak."

"Olga and Luisi," Alvin said. "Terrific. What are you doing here?"

"Auditioning."

"Auditioning? You're from Canada?"

"Canada?" Olga said with puzzlement. "No, from the agency."

"I need understudies for the stars," Alvin grumbled dismissingly. "I have no more chorus-line openings."

"It is the star jobs we wish to audition for," Olga told him. "We watched the show several times in Detroit. We have studied all the routines. They are simple."

"I developed the routines," Alvin said in an offended voice. "I don't think they're simple."

"She means, they're simply beautiful," Luisi said soothingly.

Regarding him closely for the first time, because his attention up to now had been fixed on the girl, Queen

studied him estimatingly. Finally the director said with a shrug, "Either this is a daydream or a nightmare."

"You have the music?" Olga asked. "Let us show you."

Queen shrugged again. "All right, why not? Alvin's Gong Show. Amateurs and Nuts." Turning toward the orchestra pit, he called, "Hit the music, Sam, Cue Six."

As dance music swelled, Olga and Luisi went into the routine with the elegance of seasoned professionals. Their movements were exquisitely graceful, their timing perfect. Alvin, his assistant and the chorus members stood watching with the awed appreciation of pros for master craftsmen. From the tunnel leading to the Training Room Billy Brinks watched, jealously comparing Olga's skill to Helene Robinson's. From the shadows of another tunnel, this one unlighted, the uniformed Kalik watched with Durgas. From the tunnel alongside the locker room Max Brown watched with mounting excitement.

Stepping onto the ice, Max shuffled and slid on his leather-shoe soles over alongside of Alvin. "Who are they?" he asked "Where are they from?"

"Quiet!" Queen ordered, his gaze fixed on the performing pair.

Max subsided. Olga and Luisi finished the routine with a brilliant turn and stop, and the music died. Max started to shuffle and slide out to them. Alvin gracefully skated past him and got to them first.

"I have only one thing to say," Alvin told the pair, but with his gaze fixed on Olga. "Where have you been all my life?"

"In East Europe, mainly," Olga said. "Until recently, behind what you used to call the Iron Curtain."

"You're political refugees?"

"No, on temporary visas from Poland, good for six months. We hope to get them made permanent."

"I hope you succeed," Alvin said fervently. "You are both exquisite."

Max arrived, sliding and huffing and only precariously keeping his balance. "Whoever you are, you're hired," he said. "You open the show. Alvin, no more

auditions. You work with them day and night and in between."

"What's to work?" Alvin inquired. "They're perfect, just like me."

Luisi and Olga gave him appreciative looks.

In the darkened tunnel, Kalik said in a satisfied tone, "They're in. You better make another try at that apartment. And this time get in. That girl is getting worse all the time, and I don't want her to die."

"I'll get in," the mustachioed man assured him. "This time I'll bypass those TV monitors by taking the fire escape."

They headed along the tunnel together, Kalik accompanying him in order to let Durgas out.

Kris and Kelly had watched the skating performance as engrossedly as the rest of the chorus. As the music ended and the skaters came to their spectacular stop, Kris said with an envious sigh, "They make me want to hide my skates in the sandbox. They're terrific."

"Yes, aren't they?" Kelly said dubiously.

Catching her tone, Kris eyed her curiously, "What's the matter?"

Shrugging, Kelly said, "I don't know much about professional skaters, but there can't be many with their skill floating around unemployed. It all seems so coincidental that they'd show up just in time to save the show."

After thinking this over, Kris nodded thoughtfully. "You mean maybe they've been waiting in the wings all along, *knowing* that Jack Ward and Helene Robinson were going to disappear?"

"Ambition in show business has made people do worse things to get the big break."

"You think that pair kidnapped them just to get this break?" Kris asked, fascinated.

"Whoa!" Kelly said. "I didn't make any charge such as that. I just think it's strange they appeared so fortuitously."

"Let's talk it over with Bree and see what she thinks," Kris suggested.

"It'll have to be later," Kelly said. "She was planning

to check out Helene's apartment about seven o'clock, so she's probably on her way there now. Come on! Practice makes perfect."

Kelly began practicing turns. Screwing up her courage, Kris began practicing again too. She slipped and fell.

Fifteen

Durgas parked the limousine in the alley behind the apartment building, got out and looked around in all directions. When he saw no one, he unlocked the car trunk, took out a length of rope with a grappling hook on one end, and a small jimmy. Thrusting the jimmy under his belt, he cast the grappling hook upward toward the bottom step of the upraised lower section of the fire escape.

It took him three tries before the hook caught. He pulled down the swinging lower section, held it down by placing a foot on the bottom step and tossed the rope back into the open trunk. As the swinging section would have automatically risen back up again if he had stepped away to close the trunk, he left it open. Quickly he scrambled up the iron stairway to the third floor, then moved along the iron balcony there to the kitchen window of Helene Robinson's apartment.

The window was unlocked, making it unnecessary to use the jimmy.

Leaving the kitchen window open, in case sudden escape was necessary, Durgas crossed a small living room into the bedroom. There he saw both a mirrored dresser and a bureau. He remembered that Helene had said her medicine was in the top right-hand

drawer, but he couldn't recall whether she had said the bureau or the dresser.

He tried the bureau first. The drawer was full of stockings and underwear. Durgas dumped these out on the bed, then pawed through the contents without finding the medicine bottle. Leaving the empty drawer lying on the bed, he moved over to the dresser—and spotted the bottle immediately when he opened the top right-hand drawer. He had just dropped it into his pocket when he heard the front door open.

There was no time to get to the kitchen. Durgas darted into the bathroom and slipped behind the door, from where he could see into the bedroom through the crack on the hinged side of the door. Taking a rubber gorilla mask from beneath his coat, he pulled it over his head.

This time Sabrina had been unable to find a parking place closer than two blocks away from the apartment building. Settling for it, she walked the two blocks. It was just seven P.M., she noted by her watch. By now the daytime security guard must certainly have gone off duty.

There was a recessed area immediately outside the front door of the building. Here all the mailboxes of the tenants were located. Pausing here, Sabrina peered through the glass door into the lobby. A different security guard was on duty behind the desk, engrossed in a magazine.

Sabrina turned to study the mailboxes. A doorbell button was beneath each, and a speaker tube above each. She looked over the names of the tenants on the sixth floor. Picking one at random, she pressed the button.

After a moment a male voice from the speaker said, "Yes?"

"Excuse it, please," Sabrina said. "I pushed the wrong button."

She tried three more before she finally found one where there was no answer. The name of the tenant

was Martha Pryor, and the apartment number was 616.

Stepping out on the sidewalk, Sabrina looked up at the letters carved into stone above the entrance. The name of the apartment building was the Hammond Arms. Glancing around, she spotted a public phone booth directly across the street. She crossed over, looked up the number of the apartment building, dropped in a coin and dialed.

A male voice answered, "Hammond Arms."

"Is this the security desk?" Sabrina asked.

"Yes. Hoskins speaking."

Hoping that Hoskins wasn't familiar with Martha Pryor's voice, Sabrina said, "Oh, you're on duty, Hoskins. Good. This is Martha Pryor from 616."

Apparently he did know the woman, but not well enough to be familiar with her voice. He said, "Oh yes, Miss Pryor. What can I do for you?"

"I'm phoning from downtown, Hoskins. I think I left my apartment door unlocked. Would you be a good fellow and check it for me? If it is unlocked, just set the nightlock and close it for me."

"Of course, Miss Pryor. I'll do better than that. I'll throw the dead bolt. I have a passkey."

"Thank you, Hoskins," Sabrina said. "Appreciate it."

Hanging up, she recrossed the street and peered in just in time to see the guard getting on the elevator. She waited until the elevator door closed, then went in and hurried across to the stairway. She was nearly out of breath when she reached the third floor, because she ran all the way.

Getting her picklock set from her purse, Sabrina had the apartment door open within thirty seconds. She went in and closed the door behind her. Still panting from her climb, she glanced into the kitchen, noting with mild surprise that the window there was wide open.

By the time she crossed over to the bedroom, her breathing had returned to normal. She was mildly surprised there too, by an empty drawer setting on the

bed, its contents dumped alongside. Thinking of the open kitchen window, she wondered if she had interrupted a sneak thief who had made his escape by that route when he heard her at the door.

Opening the bedroom window, she looked down. The fire-escape balcony didn't come to this window, but she could see the fire escape from here. No one was in sight, but down below in the alley a sleek black limousine was parked just beyond the fire escape, with its trunk lid standing open. Sabrina paid no particular attention to it, because it never occurred to her that a sneak thief would use such expensive transportation.

Closing the window, Sabrina glanced about the bedroom, then went over to examine the items on top of the dresser. She picked up a perfume bottle, opened it to sniff the aroma appreciatively and set it down again. She wandered into the bathroom.

In the cabinet over the sink she found several jars of face cream of various types, a jar of liquid makeup, a number of lipsticks and a set of false eyelashes in a transparent plastic box. As she closed the cabinet door, she caught a glimpse in the mirror of a gorilla face behind her.

Her first reaction was that it was a real gorilla, and she opened her mouth to scream. The scream was cut off by a thick forearm going around her neck and a large hand clapped over her mouth. Her purse dropped to the floor as she was dragged backward out of the bathroom, struggling all the way.

By now Sabrina realized she was not in the grip of a gorilla, but only a man in a gorilla mask. She planted a judo kick on his left knee, bringing a yelp of pain from him but failing to make the knee buckle. She bit down hard on the palm across her mouth, bringing another yelp of pain from him.

Her assailant now dragged her over to the closet, thrust her into it and slammed the door. She heard sounds indicating that a straight-backed chair was being propped under the doorknob. Pushing against the door, she found it immovable.

The closet was large and quite deep and pitch-dark.

By feel Sabrina located the clothing bar running from right to left about three feet back from the door. Pushing the clothing off to both sides from the center, in order to clear a section of the bar long enough to grip with both hands, she chinned herself and began swinging back and forth like a pendulum with her knees pulled up to her chest.

When she was swinging as high as she could go, Sabrina straightened her legs, emitted a karate yell and smashed the soles of her feet into the upper panel. The chair held, but her feet burst a hole in the panel. Dropping her feet to the floor, she reached through the hole to push aside the chair propped beneath the doorknob.

Throwing open the door, she rushed to the bathroom to scoop up the purse she had dropped, and headed for the kitchen at a dead run. She looked out the window just in time to see the bottom section of the fire escape lower to the ground under the weight of the large man in the gorilla mask descending it.

Grabbing her gun from her purse, but leaving the purse on the sink, Sabrina scrambled through the window and started down the fire escape. She was only halfway down when the man reached the alley, slammed the trunk lid of the limousine and climbed into the front seat. By the time she reached the bottom section, which by then had swung upward again, the limousine was beginning to move away.

She ran down the last flight while the stairs were still swinging downward, fell into a crouch the moment her feet hit the alley and took two-handed aim at the departing limousine. The vehicle screeched around the corner and out of sight at the end of the alley before she could squeeze off a shot, however.

Cursing herself for not attempting to find a nearer parking place for her own car, Sabrina gazed around for some vehicle she might commandeer in order to give chase. At the opposite end of the alley was parked a dilapidated pickup truck loaded with farm-fresh vegetables. A weight scale sat on the tailgate of the truck,

and a scrawny man in overalls was weighing tomatoes for an old-lady customer.

By the time Sabrina had raced to the truck, the transaction had been completed and the old lady was walking away with her bag of tomatoes. Coming to a panting halt, Sabrina gasped to the man standing behind the truck, "Would you consider renting me this truck?"

Sabrina had forgotten she was still holding her revolver. Looking at it, the farmer shot his hands overhead.

"It's an emergency," Sabrina said, then paused to regard the overalled man with puzzlement. "Why are you holding your arms that way?"

The farmer rolled his eyes toward the gun.

Finally realizing she was still holding it, Sabrina said apologetically, "Oh, I'm sorry. Listen, my name is Sabrina Duncan and I work for— Oh never mind, we'll settle later."

Leaping into the cab of the truck, Sabrina started the ancient engine, backed and turned and roared off down the alley. Since the farmer had lowered the tailgate, vegetables began rolling out of the back all over the alley.

Sabrina reached the end of the alley, wheeled into the street and broadsided into a passing police car.

Sixteen

No one in either vehicle was hurt. Sabrina sat stunned and embarrassed as the two police officers climbed from the radio car and grimly approached her.

Sensing she was in deep trouble, she tried to set a light note by offering a cheery, "Hi."

The older officer was slightly overweight and middle-aged. The younger one was built like a line-backer. Sabrina directed her smile at him, but unfortunately the older man was the spokesman.

He said with cold politeness, "Step out of the truck, please, miss."

"Listen, you're probably wondering—"

"Out of the truck, please," the middle-aged officer interrupted.

Sabrina edged out of the truck, looked at the crumpled front end, the bashed-in side of the police car, and gazed around at the vegetables lying all over the street. The younger officer took out a note pad and a pencil, preparing to take notes.

"License, please," the older officer said.

Sabrina pursed her lips. "That would be a driver's license?"

"That's the idea," the younger policeman said.

"Oh, yes. Listen, you're never going to believe this, but I don't have it with me. You see, when I pulled my gun out of my purse—this gun here—"

She reached back into the front seat of the truck to lift her revolver from the seat. She turned to find herself looking into the muzzles of two .38 police revolvers.

"I was just showing it to you," Sabrina said reproachfully, holding it out to the older man suspended from her finger by the trigger guard.

The policeman took it from her, and both officers put away their own guns.

"Now just run over that last part once again," the older cop said patiently.

"Sure. When I pulled my gun out of my purse to—to—well, to shoot at the gorilla who was driving the limousine, I left it in the room. My purse, I mean, with my driver's license in it. On account of I was in a hurry."

The younger officer had stopped in the middle of his note taking. With pencil poised he asked, "The gorilla driving the limousine?"

"Well, it wasn't really a gorilla. I mean a gorilla

can't drive, right?" She tried for a joke. "Even if *he* had a license. So it was probably somebody dressed like a gorilla."

The older policeman asked, "Have you been drinking, ma'am?"

Shaking her head and holding up her left hand, she said, "Scout's honor."

"Is this your truck?"

"Well, not really. I rented this truck. Well, actually I didn't quite rent it, although I mean to pay rent for it when I settle with the owner. I sort of borrowed it."

The younger officer began to write again. The older one said quietly, "You borrowed it?"

Nodding vigorously, Sabrina said, "You could say that, yes."

Still quietly, the older man said, "You stole the truck, didn't you?"

After a long pause, Sabrina admitted, "You could say that too."

The younger policeman stopped writing and started to erase. The overalled truck owner appeared from the mouth of the alley and pointed at Sabrina.

"Stop that woman!" he yelled. "She stole my truck."

The two policemen gazed at him curiously. The older one spoke. "Just hang on, mister, and we'll get to you in a minute." Then he returned his attention to Sabrina.

Sabrina said, "Listen, I'm a detective."

The older policeman examined her gravely, as though evaluating her degree of sanity. "A detective?" he said.

"Right."

He emitted a little sigh. "Lady, I believe everything you've told me. But you know what?"

"You don't believe I'm a detective," Sabrina said resignedly.

Taking out some handcuffs, he said, "Does this answer your question?" After cuffing her wrists behind her, he said, "Get in the car, please."

Resigned, Sabrina started toward the police car. The younger officer followed her, while the older turned his

attention to the owner of the wrecked truck. Sabrina waited for the younger one to open the rear door of the police car, but he was still busy writing on his pad.

The younger one called to his partner, "How do you spell gorilla?"

The older man merely shook his head. The younger one looked at Sabrina.

On a pixie whim, Sabrina said, "G-U-E-R-R-I-L-L-A." Writing it down, the man looked up in surprise. "Oh, you meant one of them terrorists. I thought you meant the animal."

Sabrina decided to let it stand. The police report was going to be interesting, she thought.

At police headquarters they let her make a phone call, and she called Bosley at home.

"I'm in a little trouble," she told him. "I'm phoning from Auto Theft at Parker Center."

"Auto Theft?" Bosley said. "Someone steal your car?"

"*Au contraire*, Bosley. A farmer is under the impression that I stole his truck. It's just a misunderstanding. I commandeered it to chase a suspect, and didn't have time to explain that the agency would pay a rental fee."

"You've been arrested for auto theft?"

"Actually it's called 'grand theft, auto.' Then when I hit the police car—"

"You hit a police car?" Bosley interrupted in a high voice.

"Not on purpose. Are you going to bail me out?"

"My impulse is to say no, but Charlie would never forgive me. I'm waiting for Kris and Kelly to report in. Soon as they do, I'll be down. Where will I find you?"

"In the Auto Theft squad room on the third floor. Do you want an explanation?"

"I certainly do, but not now. It can wait until I pick you up."

Bosley hung up.

An hour later the three angels and Bosley entered the Beverly Hills office of Charles Townsend, Private

Investigations. Bosley flicked on the light in the office and went over to the bar to mix himself a drink. The girls all sat down.

"Anyone else want a drink?" Bosley asked.

Kris and Kelly both shook their heads. "Kris and I haven't had dinner yet," Kelly said. "We went straight from the arena to your house, and straight from there to Parker Center."

"I'll have a double Bourbon on the rocks," Sabrina said.

"Still feeling shaken?" Bosley asked with raised brows. "You've been rescued from the clutches of the law, Sabrina. However . . ."

He put ice in a glass and poured Bourbon over it. He carried it and his own drink, a Scotch and water, over and handed Sabrina hers.

Kelly said, "I wonder what Charlie will say?"

"You mean about the cost of Sabrina's bail?" Kris asked.

"It really adds up, doesn't it?" Kelly said. "Operating a vehicle without a license. Stealing a truck, reckless driving. I never before heard of 'felony littering.'"

"I'll break the news to Charlie tomorrow," Bosley said. "Meanwhile, what have we learned while Sabrina was turning into one of the Ten Most Wanted?" He looked at Sabrina. "Helene's apartment tell you anything?"

"Well," Sabrina said, "a woman doesn't go away for a romantic weekend and leave behind her most expensive perfume, all her makeup and her false eyelashes."

"Which pretty much confirms Helene's disappearance as a kidnap," Kelly volunteered.

"Pretty much," Kris agreed.

"By the way," Sabrina asked, "whoever it was in Helene's apartment, you'll find a set of teeth marks on his right palm."

"If it was Billy Brinks," Kris said, "I think I can get close enough to find out. He likes me."

"If it was Billy, I wouldn't get too close," Sabrina warned. "He's not fully domesticated yet. Incidentally, there's some damage at the apartment Charlie will

have to pay for too. The hole I kicked in the closet door."

"Charlie's not going to love you," Bosley said. "How do you plan to get your purse back from the apartment?"

"I think I'll do what the gorilla did," Sabrina said. "Go up the fire escape."

In the factory storeroom, Helene Robinson and Jack Ward were seated on the lumber pile, silent with depression. Little Paul Boyer was banging on the door. After a time it opened and the man in the Kissinger mask waved the security guard back with his .45.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I got to go to the john."

"You just went an hour ago," the ex-Secretary of State complained.

"So I got to go again. Also, how about getting us some changes of clothes, if you're going to keep us here forever?"

The man in the Kissinger mask made no answer to that. He merely gestured the little man to come out, closed and locked the sliding door, and escorted him to the restroom. A few minutes later he brought him back.

An hour after that the sliding door opened again. This time a man in a gorilla mask came in, also carrying a gun.

"Who are you?" Paul Boyer asked.

Ignoring him, the man handed Helene a medicine bottle. "Here," he growled. "I hope you appreciate it, because it was an awful lot of trouble."

"Oh, thank you," she said, immediately opening the bottle and taking out two pills.

The little security guard said, "I know your voice. You used to be Jimmy Carter. How come you changed masks?"

Continuing to ignore him, the man went out, closed and locked the sliding door behind him.

Outside, in the main factory room, Durgas removed the mask and returned to the office. Only Kalik was

there, seated on one of the wooden boxes. Durgas held out his palm to show the scar-faced Kalik the teeth marks on it.

"Who did that?" Kalik asked.

"A friend of Helene's named Sabrina Duncan. The same woman who stymied me from getting into the apartment yesterday."

"How'd it happen?"

"She came back tonight, and caught me in the apartment. This happened when I was dragging her over to stuff her in the closet."

"She saw your face?" Kalik asked sharply.

"Of course not. I put on my mask when I heard her come in." He looked at his palm again. "You think I could get rabies?"

"You get rabies from dogs, not wildcats!" Kalik said.

Grunting, the mustachioed man seated himself on one of the boxes and examined his hand again. Presently he asked, "When do I go in?"

"Soon," Kalik said.

"I need time to fix the guns, and there are only a few days left."

"You will have time," Kalik said. "Fix them right. There is much killing to do, and very little time to do it."

Seventeen

The next afternoon one of the Ice Follies chorus girls failed to show up. After fuming for a time because that threw the rear line out of balance with the front one, Alvin Queen went back to the original single line, now with eleven members.

Having settled that problem, Alvin turned the chorus line over to his assistant and concentrated on working with his two new stars. Their performance obviously delighted him. He ran them through every one of their routines, and they had all of them down perfectly.

Gregg Alger was not having quite the same degree of success with the chorus line. Everyone but Kris now had the routines down pat, but Kris periodically still stumbled and sat on the ice. Kelly was now performing as well as any of the chorus members.

About 6:30 P.M. Alvin decided there was no room for improvement in his new stars and told them they could go home. He skated over to see how his assistant was doing.

Alger was putting the line through one of the more complicated routines. As they turned and twisted, he chanted, "Three, four, step to the right."

Kris lurched, recovered her balance, but threw off the rest of the skaters.

Alger shouted, "Hold it!"

As the skaters all came to a ragged halt, Alvin called, "Give them a rest, Gregg. Take five, gang. And when I say five, I mean three hundred seconds."

The chorus members started for the sidelines. Alvin skated over alongside Kris and stopped her by touching her arm. Kris skidded to a halt and looked at him with embarrassment.

"I'm sorry, Alvin," she said. "I'll work on that move tonight."

Alvin said in a not unkindly tone. "Honey, you don't have enough nights in your life to get that move. Look, I'm going to have to take you out of the line and give you over to Michael."

"Michael?" Kris asked.

"The redheaded fellow. You've been skating right next to him for three days."

"Oh, *that* Michael," Kris said. "What do you mean, turn me over to him?"

"He used to be a clown. We'll have him give you a quick course in clowning. Put you in a red nose, a

pillow here, a pillow there, and—I hate to ruin such a figure, but this way if you fall, they'll think it's funny."

Alvin began to skate away. Kris stopped him and kissed his cheek.

"What's that for?" Alvin asked, pleased.

"For being so sweet and not firing me."

"I can't stand gushy," Alvin said with pretended severity. "Now go report to Michael and tell him what I told you."

Instead of immediately obeying, Kris skated over to where Kelly was sitting on the rail surrounding the rink. "Guess what," she said. "Alvin's taking me out of the line and making me a clown."

"Me too?" Kelly asked.

"He didn't mention you. I guess you're good enough now to stay in the line."

"Maybe I'll be spotted by some movie director after all," Kelly said in a pleased voice.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" Kris asked. "Bosley said we're only here for the rehearsals, and won't actually have to perform."

"I think things have changed," Kelly said. "Now Alvin's counting on us. If we didn't show up opening night, it would throw everything out of kilter."

Sabrina parked her car in the lot and walked along the sidewalk toward the front entrance to the Sports Arena. Just before she reached it, a scrawny man of about fifty wearing a tattered trench coat stepped in front of her.

In a cultured voice he said, "Would you be interested in advancing me, Mason Fairchild, a loan payable within a year at twelve percent interest, which is better than what the banks are offering?"

After gazing at him quizzically for a moment, Sabrina said, "No thanks," and moved around him.

Raising his arms theatrically, the derelict said to the heavens, "I thought this territory would pay dividends, Lord. I have been here more than a week, night and

day, and haven't been compensated enough to drown a termite, no less wet a man's whistle."

Halting, Sabrina turned around. "You've been here over a week, constantly?"

"Through thick and thin, foul weather and worse. Except for an occasional trip to the public john, and even less frequent trips to the local liquor store. You don't have a little drink in that bag of yours now, do you?"

Sabrina shook her head. "But if you would answer a few questions, maybe we can work out something."

Mason Fairchild drew himself up to his full height. "Are you intimating that I have my price?"

"Yes."

Nodding agreeably, Fairchild said, "There is a small but delightful tavern only a few blocks from here. I would be glad to direct you. It's merely a pleasant walk away."

Gallantly he offered his arm. Taking it, Sabrina steered him in the direction of the parking lot. "I think we'll drive," she said.

The place was called Dewey's Alehouse, and was licensed to sell only beer and wine. It was a typical beer bar, with a shuffleboard game and a couple of coin-operated pool tables. The bar was solidly lined with men.

Sabrina and Fairchild took a corner table. He ordered muscatel and Sabrina ordered Chablis. She waited until the wine had arrived before trying to question him, because he was so obviously eager for a drink that she was afraid she couldn't get his attention until he had had at least one.

When the drinks arrived, she expected him to toss off his wine like a shot of whiskey, but he merely sipped at it appreciatively.

"Ah, sweet nectar!" he crooned.

Sabrina barely tasted her drier wine, then set down the glass. "Okay, now tell me if you saw anything out of the ordinary during your vigil outside the Sports Arena."

"Besides the pink flamingos?"

Apparently the man suffers the DTs, Sabrina thought ruefully. She said, "Besides them."

"Would you believe a long, black thing that spits money and sucks people right off the streets?"

"The flamingos sounded better," Sabrina said dryly.

"Must be thirty feet long."

"What?"

"Pay attention, young lady," he said severely. "In five minutes I may not be coherent." He took a somewhat larger sip of his drink.

"Sorry," Sabrina said. "Tell me again."

"Black and long with smoked windows."

"A car!" Sabrina said. "A limousine! A black limousine."

"You *are* a believer," he said, pleased. He took an even longer sip of wine, which emptied the glass.

Signaling the bartender for another one, Sabrina said, "I think I've seen it."

Mason Fairchild waited until the bartender had brought over his fresh wine, Sabrina had paid for it and the bartender had walked away. Then he said, "Yes, it sits there like a beast. Sucks 'em in and spits 'em out. Like a vacuum cleaner. Whoosh!"

Sabrina contemplated asking him to explain that, then decided to table it momentarily for a more important question. "I didn't get close enough to get the license plates. Did you?"

He took a reflective sip of his wine. "Only in the 1930 movies did they do that. But on the other hand, it was in the thirties that they had a fine sherry. It was called Diplomat. Fine bouquet. That's what it said on the license. 'Diplomat.'"

"Diplomat? Are you sure?"

Fairchild squared his shoulders. "Young lady, do I look like someone who isn't sure of himself?"

"I wish you hadn't asked me that," Sabrina said. "Just what do you mean by the limousine 'sucking 'em in and spitting 'em out'?"

Fairchild sipped his wine. "Actually it was in reverse order. First it spit out money. At Billy Brinks, the Ice Follies' gopher. He was kind enough to loan

me five dollars from the bonanza. That was shortly before the President and his entourage came out carrying two bodies wrapped in blankets."

"The President and his entourage?" Sabrina repeated, totally at sea.

"Yes. President Carter, Henry Kissinger, ex-President Nixon, and an ape."

Remembering the gorilla mask worn by her assailant at Helene Robinson's apartment, Sabrina began to see light. "You sure it was an ape, not a gorilla?" she asked.

After considering, Fairchild said definitely, "An ape."

"And they were carrying two bodies?"

"Well, two people. Whether they were dead or alive is a moot question. They were wrapped in blankets."

"They were put in the limousine?"

He nodded. "Kissinger drove. The President sat with him, and the others all got in back."

"Do you recall just when this was?" Sabrina asked.

Reflecting, Fairchild finally said, "Some days ago. I'm not sure just when, except it was early in the morning. Before the local liquor store opened. And before the other man got sucked in."

That made it almost certain that he had witnessed the kidnapping of Helene Robinson and Jack Ward, Sabrina thought. "About the man who was sucked into the limousine," she said. "Who was that, and when did it happen?"

"Last night, I think. Or maybe the night before. Time has a habit of running together. At any rate it was around dusk. The little fellow who works as a security guard."

"Paul Boyer?"

"I believe that is his name. Sucked right in. The door never opened, just the window. And it sucked him in headfirst." He finished his second glass of wine and looked at Sabrina expectantly.

Rising to her feet, Sabrina said, "Suppose we stop by the local liquor store and pick you up a bottle?"

Beaming at her, he rose to his feet also. "You are

a most understanding young lady." He glanced at the three quarters she had left lying on the table. "Is that meant for me, or as a gratuity for the barkeep?"

"The latter," Sabrina answered, keeping an eye on the coins as she steered him away from the table.

"Well, I would probably have only squandered it on drink anyway," he said philosophically as he allowed himself to be led from the tavern.

As they removed their skates in the locker room after rehearsal, Kelly examined the blade on her left one, then shook it back and forth.

"Hey, if that's loose," one of the chorus girls said, "you better get it over to Iggy fast."

"Iggy?" Kelly said.

"The prop man, Iggy Svensen. He can fix anything."

"Where do I find him?"

"In the room labeled 'Equipment Room,' halfway down the tunnel on the opposite side. He'll still be there, because he's been working nights to get ready for the grand opening."

"Mind waiting while I have Iggy check my skate?" Kelly said to Kris.

"Go ahead. Michael offered to give me a clown lesson if I wanted to stay over awhile. I said no, because I didn't want to keep you waiting, but he's still around. I'll tell him I changed my mind."

Kelly finished changing into her street clothes, then carried the skate along the tunnel to the door lettered "Equipment Room." The door was closed. Kelly knocked.

A slightly high male voice from inside called, "If you're Alvin, go away, because the muskets aren't ready yet."

Opening the door, Kelly stuck in her head. "And if I'm not?"

The little man seated on a high stool at a workbench glanced her way, examined her critically and gave her a wide smile of approval. He was a joyous looking little gremlin of about sixty with dancing eyes

in a seamed but pixieish face. On the bench in front of him was a partially assembled musket of 1776 vintage. Piled on the end of the bench were a number of other muskets in various stages of completion, some painted and assembled, some only partly painted.

Closing the door behind her, Kelly approached the workbench. Holding out her skate, she said, "They told me you can fix anything. My blade's a little loose, I think."

Taking the skate, Iggy jiggled the blade. "No sweat," he said cheerfully. "This is what blew me out."

"Excuse me?" Kelly said in puzzlement.

Jumping down from the stool, the little man walked in a circle, showing off a pronounced limp. "See, I used to do a double flip, with a roll over more barrels than you got freckles. Came down perfect, elevation and everything. But the blade snapped. So did my leg."

Laughing, he jumped into the air, clicked his heels together, and landed as lightly as a cat. He limped back to the workbench, shifted the stool over in front of a vise, climbed back up on the stool and put the skate in the vise.

Eighteen

As Iggy began to work on the skate, Kelly said, "I really appreciate this."

Concentrating on the blade, the little man murmured, "You're one of the new ones, aren't you?"

"Yes. Sometimes I feel like a stranger in a crowd. Everyone seems to know what's going on except me."

"What's going on?" he said without looking up. "Going on about what?"

"I mean about your two lead skaters who disappeared."

"Helene and Jack?"

"Yes. Do you have any idea what happened to them?"

"I figure they're dead," Iggy said casually. "Yup, dead."

Cocking an eyebrow at him, Kelly asked, "How come you figure that?"

Before answering, he made a final adjustment on her skate blade, then took the skate from the vise and handed it to her. "When you got ice in your blood, you don't just up and leave," he said. "Look at me. Gimpy leg and all, if I get too far from ice, I get nervous. Yeah, they must be dead."

"It doesn't seem to bother you very much."

"Listen, being human is a terminal illness. We all get what we deserve when we deserve it. Yeah, I figure they're dead."

Kelly wondered whether this was just philosophy, or masked some actual knowledge. While she was trying to devise another question, the door opened and Alvin and Max burst in together.

"We're waiting for the muskets, Iggy," Alvin said.

Frowning at the director, Iggy said, "You're asking about the muskets?"

"Your hearing is perfect, Iggy," Max growled.

Sliding from his stool, Iggy limped to the end of the workbench and lifted one of the completed muskets from the pile. "Come here, young lady," he said to Kelly.

Obediently going over to him, Kelly accepted the musket he thrust at her.

"Now put it to your shoulder and aim it at them," Iggy instructed.

With instinctive reluctance to aim even a fake gun at anyone, Kelly pointed the muzzle to one side of Alvin and Max.

"Do it like we've been rehearsing," Alvin suggested.

Nodding, Kelly placed the musket at right-shoulder-

arms and stood at attention. She performed in cadence as Alvin chanted, "Port arms, one-two-three and up muskets, point right, pull the trigger and— Out of sight!"

As Kelly pulled the trigger, a small American flag had popped from the muzzle. Alvin and Max both looked elated.

"Perfect," Alvin purred.

"Even better than perfect yet," Max said. "So when will they all be fixed?"

"I figure I'll work through the night, and I'll have 'em all rinksided by tomorrow's rehearsal," Iggy said.

"You're perfect, too," Alvin told the little man.

"I know," Iggy said immodestly.

Back in the locker room Kelly found Kris alone, changed into her street clothes.

"Michael teach you everything already?" Kelly asked as she put away her skate.

"It was just sort of a lecture," Kris said. "We'll get down to the nitty-gritty tomorrow."

The door from the tunnel opened and Sabrina came in. "I've got some hot stuff," she announced. "We'll have to call a meeting with Charlie."

"What have you got?" Kris asked.

"It can wait until the meeting, so I won't have to say it twice. Let's call Boz from here to set it up."

"Don't make it too early," Kelly said. "We haven't had dinner yet. Have you?"

Sabrina shook her head. "I'll tell Bosley to set it for nine-thirty tonight. That'll give us plenty of time to grab something en route to Beverly Hills."

Glancing around, she saw a pay phone on the wall. Going over to it, she located a coin in her purse, dropped it in and dialed Bosley's home number.

"I see you got your purse back," Kris said.

Nodding, Sabrina said, "I didn't go up the fire escape, though. Pulled the same stunt as yesterday." Then she said into the phone, "Hello, Bosley?"

When Sabrina finished arranging for the meeting, the three girls left the locker room. In the lobby they

found Alvin Queen and Max Brown talking to the new security guard, and stopped to eavesdrop.

"What time do you close up and leave here at night?" Alvin asked the scar-faced guard.

"Whenever everybody's out," the guard said. "Usually about eight P.M."

"Tonight Iggy Svensen will be working late in the Equipment Room," Max said. "Maybe all night. What do you do about that?"

"Billy Brinks has a key," the guard said. "And he stays late. Sometimes he even sleeps here. I'll speak to him about letting out Mr. Svensen."

Max nodded. "Good idea. I'll go speak to him myself, then he'll do it. You he might tell no." He turned to the angels, standing a few feet away. "Yes, girls?"

"Just stopped to say good night," Kelly said.

"Oh, sure. Good night."

"Good night," Alvin echoed.

The new security guard let the three girls out and locked the door behind them.

Not long afterward, the angels stopped for dinner at the Brown Derby in Beverly Hills, and got to the office promptly at 9:30. Bosley was already talking on the phone to Charlie when they walked in.

"Here they are now, Charlie," Bosley said.

"Good evening, angels," Charlie's voice said from the squawk box.

"Good evening, Charlie," the three girls chorused.

As they all found seats, Charlie said, "I got you off the hook for your felonious behavior yesterday, Sabrina. It was a little expensive, because it involved forfeiture of all bail—but you won't go to jail. Matter of fact, you won't even have to appear in court."

"Thank you, Charlie," Sabrina said gratefully.

"You're welcome, angel. I consider you worth the expense. Now what is this important development that required a special meeting?"

"I found a witness to the kidnapping," Sabrina said. "A bum who panhandles in front of the Sports Arena. Name of Mason Fairchild."

"Mason Fairchild?" Kelly repeated. "That sounds like a character from *Gone With the Wind*."

"He may be from there," Sabrina said. "He has a courtly Southern manner. But he's still a bum. A wino."

"Get on with it, Sabrina," Charlie said patiently. "This unexpected meeting required postponing a rather important activity I had scheduled."

"What activity is that, Charlie?" Kris asked.

"You're too young to know, Kris. Sabrina?"

"He witnessed the kidnapping, Charlie. At least I think what he saw was the kidnapping. He isn't sure what day it was, but it was early in the morning. Four people came out of the Sports Arena carrying two blanket-wrapped figures. They all got into a big black limousine and drove off."

"Could he describe the four people?" Charlie asked.

"Oh, yes. He said it was President Jimmy Carter, Henry Kissinger, ex-President Richard Nixon, and an ape."

There was a lengthy silence before Bosley said, "The wino was having the DTs. Why are you wasting our time with this nonsense, Sabrina?"

"Remember the man in the gorilla mask who grabbed me at Helene's apartment, Bosley? And who escaped in a limousine of the same description?"

After another silence, Bosley asked, "They were wearing rubber masks?"

"That's my guess, although Mason didn't say that. It seems a more reasonable explanation than believing it actually was the President, the ex-President, the ex-Secretary of State, and an ape."

"You have a point there, Sabrina," Charlie's voice broke in. "We will assume he was describing what he actually saw, within the limits of his wine-soaked brain. How did he describe the limousine?"

It was Sabrina's turn for silence. Eventually she said, with reluctance, "He said it was thirty feet long. He also says it sucks in people and spits out money."

"That's just great!" Bosley said. "Now, a drunk who sounds like a bad song is supplying our clues."

"The person it sucked in was Paul Boyer," Sabrina continued, "the security guard at the arena. And the money was spit at Billy Brinks. Mason says Billy loaned him five dollars out of the amount. That could be the money I saw in Billy's locker, Charlie."

"Indeed . . ." Charlie said thoughtfully. "But what's this about the limousine sucking in Boyer?"

"It could be another kidnapping, Charlie," Kelly put in. "Maybe they wanted their own security guard in the building."

"A good point, Kelly. Is there a new security guard?"

"Yes," Kris said, "Paul's cousin, George Boyer. Paul is supposed to be out with the flu."

"I'll check to see if he actually is. And run a check on his cousin too. Anything else, Sabrina?"

"Well, Mason said the limousine had license plates reading 'Diplomat.'"

"Ouch!" Charlie said. "That means the car is from some foreign consulate in the city. And that in turn means some foreign government is involved. This could get very sticky."

"I know, Charlie," Sabrina said. "And I've got a feeling we're running out of time."

"Do you other angels have anything to report?" Charlie asked. "Kris, have you had an opportunity to see if Billy Brinks has teeth marks on his palm?"

"Not yet, Charlie. I'll try to get a look tomorrow."

"Kelly?"

"Nothing definite to report, Charlie. I talked to a little man named Iggy Svensen, who makes all the props for the ice show. He's convinced that Helene Robinson and Jack Ward are dead, but I don't think he actually knows anything. Impressed me as just a hunch he had."

"Well, perhaps you had better get him to talk a little more. Anything else?" When none of the girls spoke, Charlie said, "Well, stick in there, angels."

You'll be hearing from me tomorrow about Paul Boyer and his cousin George. Good night."

"Good night, Charlie," the girls chorused. Then Kris asked, "Do you still have time for that activity you had to postpone, Charlie?"

"If I hurry, angel."

"But you don't want to tell us what it is?"

"It's nothing I'm ashamed of, Kris. I just felt it wouldn't interest you girls."

"It interests us!" the three said in unison. Then Kris asked, "Does it involve another person?"

"Seven of them, Kris!"

"Seven!" Kris said, shocked. "You're involved in group sex?"

"Is your mind always on sex, Kris?" Charlie asked chidingly. "I'm invited to a poker game."

Nineteen

About ten P.M. Kalik, still in his security-guard uniform, looked into the Training Room. Billy Brinks was sitting on one of the rubdown tables, reading a comic book. He looked up with a frown at the interruption.

"I thought you was long gone," Billy said. "Max told me to let Iggy out and make sure the door was locked after him."

"I had a few things to do," Kalik said. "I'm getting ready to go off duty now, soon as I have a nightcap. Care to join me?"

He produced two bottles of beer from the paper sack he was carrying and set them on the end of the training table.

"Sure," Billy replied appreciatively.

The bottles had screw-on caps. Kalik unscrewed both and handed one to Billy. He raised his own. "Here's to Helene Robinson."

"Hey, I'll drink to that anytime!" Billy said with enthusiasm, taking a large swig.

Ten minutes later Kalik gently lowered Billy onto his back on the training table. He left him snoring, turned out the light and closed the door behind him.

Kalik went to the Equipment Room and stuck his head in the door. Little Iggy Svensen was working under a hanging lamp suspended over the workbench. As it shed its light primarily over the workbench, the doorway was in virtual darkness. Iggy didn't notice the uniformed man.

Kalik quietly withdrew, easing the door shut behind him.

At eleven p.m. Kalik was waiting in the lobby when a double knock came at the arena door. Cracking it open, the security guard saw it was Durgas, and opened the door wide enough to let him in. The big man was carrying a valise, and was dressed in his usual dark suit and matching turtleneck sweater.

Locking the door after him, Kalik led the way from the lobby to the locker room, where he changed from his uniform to a dark suit and sweater similar to Durgas'. From the valise Durgas removed two masks and handed Kalik one. Kalik pulled his Kissinger mask over his head, then looked in surprise at Durgas' gorilla mask.

"What happened to Jimmy Carter?" he asked.

"You know tore him," Durgas said briefly.

Durgas took a bottle of chloroform and a large washcloth from the valise. Kalik led the way up the tunnel to the door marked "Equipment room."

When Kalik opened the door, Iggy Svensen was in the act of "loading" one of the maskets. He had the barrel detached from the stock, and was folding up a small flag in an umbrella-type device. He slipped the device into the back part of the barrel and snapped the barrel into the stock.

Becoming conscious of someone entering the room,

Iggy looked toward the door. Because of the shaded work lamp, he at first could make out only that it was two large men.

"I thought I was the only crazy who works this late," Iggy said.

The men made no answer, merely standing there. One uncapped a bottle and poured some of its contents onto a large cloth. Iggy tilted up the work lamp to illuminate the men's faces, and saw the masks of Kissinger and a gorilla.

"Who's that?" he asked fearfully.

Dropping the lampshade, which made it start to swing back and forth, casting shadows all over the room, he slid from his stool. The two large men bore in at him.

"Hey, what's with the funny faces?" Iggy asked, limping to one side so that a table containing props was between him and the men.

The masked men rounded the table from either side.

Terrified, Iggy cried out, "Hey, enough already! If this is funny, I'm not laughing. Whadda you want? Take off the masks—*please!*"

The men grabbed him by both arms. The man in the Kissinger mask put an arm about his neck from behind, holding him immobile. The other pressed the cloth to his face. Recognizing the odor of chloroform, Iggy tried to hold his breath. Eventually he had to breathe, of course. His body went limp.

The powerful Durgas lifted the little man in a fireman's carry. Kalik opened the door for him, then led the way along the tunnel to the corridor circling the building, and afterward to the tunnel where the Training Room was.

Billy Brinks was still snoring on the rubdown table. Kalik opened a closet and took a blanket from a shelf. He spread it on the other rubdown table, and Durgas laid Iggy on it. They rolled the blanket around the little man.

Kalik now led the way back to the locker room, put the chloroform bottle and washcloth in the valise

there, and also the two masks, and closed the valise. He carried it to the side door leading to the parking lot, Durgas following him, carrying Iggy over his back. Unlocking the door, Kalik held it open for Durgas to go through first, then locked the door from outside.

Durgas loaded the blanket-wrapped figure into the rear seat of the black limousine which was parked on the lot, and climbed in next to it. Kalik got behind the wheel and drove off.

Twenty

The angels were gathered in the office with Bosley at nine A.M. Bosley dialed Charlie's number and reported that everyone was present.

"Good morning, angels," Charlie's voice said from the squawk box. "I trust you all had pleasant nights."

"I slept," Kris said. "That's all I do at night since we've had this assignment. I get home exhausted."

"Me too," Kelly said.

"How was your night, Charlie?" Sabrina asked.

"It would have been better if our little meeting had taken longer," Charlie said ruefully. "It would have been better if the meeting had lasted all night! Do you have anything to report?"

"I got a call from Alvin Queen this morning," Kris said, "moving rehearsal up from three P.M. to ten A.M. Kelly says she got one too."

"That hardly has any bearing on the case," Charlie said. "Anything to report about that?"

"We haven't worked on it since our last meeting last night, Charlie," Sabrina answered. "Did you check out Paul Boyer?"

"Yes. He lives alone in a room over on Franklin

Avenue in Hollywood. His landlady hasn't seen him in recent days. He does have a cousin named George Boyer, according to the landlady, but she doesn't know where he lives, and he isn't listed in the phone book. It is possible, of course, that Paul is staying with his cousin while he has the flu. But I suggest you get in conversation with the new guard and find out as much as you can about him."

"I can handle that," Kelly said. "He's been giving me the eye."

"Good. And Kris, don't forget to get a look at Billy Brinks' hand."

"All right, Charlie," Kris said.

"What about me, Charlie?" Sabrina asked. "What do you want me to do?"

"Check out all the foreign consulates in town. Find out which one uses a big black limousine with smoked windows."

"All right, Charlie," Sabrina said.

"That's it, angels, until next time. Good hunting."

Kris and Kelly had no time to check out Billy Brinks and the new security guard before rehearsal, because they didn't arrive at the Sports Arena until ten of ten. When they entered the locker room, the redheaded Michael was in a clown suit, but without makeup. He handed Kris a bulky package.

"Your clown outfit," he said. "We won't bother with makeup until the actual performance."

Kris and Kelly went into the ladies' room to change, then put on their skates and stepped out on the ice at exactly ten A.M. Alvin gave them an irritated look for being the last ones out, but since they weren't actually late, he could hardly say anything.

Kris' clown outfit was red on the right side, yellow on the left, and had baggy pants. With a pillow stuffed in her stomach and a smaller one in the back of her pants, her figure was rather ridiculous. Michael wore a green-and-purple suit, also with baggy legs, but without padding.

Michael was over in one corner next to a barrel

lying on its side. When Kris skated over, he said, "First I'll teach you the barrel-jumping routine."

"You expect me to jump over that barrel?" Kris asked unbelievably.

"I'll show you how to get over it, but you won't jump. I go first, land on the barrel on the seat of my pants and do a somersault when I roll off of it. You come behind me, jump only about a foot off the ice, land on the barrel on your stomach and roll over it. As you come down on the ice, give the barrel a kick, and it will roll backward while you're sliding forward on your stomach. Got it?"

"I think it's got me," Kris said. "I'll probably get killed—but anything so that the show can go on. Let's go."

To her surprise Kris found that it wasn't a difficult feat. Her padded stomach made hitting the ice painless, and she rode the pillow like a sled as she skidded along on her stomach. After three tries, Michael decided she had it down well enough so that he moved on to the next routine.

Meantime, Alvin was drilling his new stars and the chorus in the routines in which they performed together. Just before noon he got to the finale. Max Brown arrived about then, and stood at the edge of the tunnel next to the locker room, watching.

"All right now," Queen called. "Port arms! One-two-three and up muskets, point right, pull the trigger and— Out of sight!"

The skaters went through the motions without muskets, merely using their hands. Max came walking across the ice, slipping and sliding, preceded by his words.

"What is this with 'muskets up,' and all I see is hands?" he called while still a dozen feet away. Then, as he neared: "Alvin darling, how are they going to feel the weight and everything if they always use their hands?"

"All right, children, lunch," Alvin called to the skaters. Turning back to Max, he said, "Iggy said he'd

have them by rehearsal time, but that's usually three P.M. He doesn't know I called early rehearsal."

Rolling his eyes upward, as though beseeching heaven to witness his travail, Max slipped and slid back to the tunnel. As soon as his feet hit solid concrete, he jogged along the tunnel to the Equipment Room.

Throwing open the door, he yelled, "Iggy, what is this with no muskets?"

No one was in the room. The muskets lay on the bench, only about three-quarters completed. Max gazed at them in outrage for a moment, then rushed back out of the room.

Billy Brinks had been watching the skaters perform. When the noon break came, the chorus line and clowns headed for the locker room, but Olga and Luisi entered the tunnel leading to the Training Room. Billy fell in behind them, meaning to help Olga off with her skates.

In the room a large man with a thick mustache with pointed ends was seated on a stool. Walking on the tips of her skates, Olga went over to give him a kiss on the cheek.

"Hey!" Billy said. "Ain't supposed to be any visitors in here."

"It is all right, Billy," Olga soothed. "He is my cousin, visiting from the other side."

Billy regarded the man dubiously, but couldn't think of anything to do about him. When Olga seated herself on one of the rubdown tables, Billy decided to ignore him, and bent to undo Olga's ankle tapes. Luisi sat on the other table and began to take off his skates.

Max Brown came barging in. "Billy, where is my Iggy?" he demanded.

Glancing up, Billy said, "I don't know."

"How could you *not* know?" Max asked heatedly. "Between you and Iggy, I depend on you for everything."

Billy returned his attention to Olga's ankles. "I didn't see him today."

"Well, when you see him, tell him he's fired, and if you find him, tell him we need those muskets."

He started out, spotted the man seated on the stool and stopped again. "Who are you?" he inquired. "You know we got a rule there's no visitors in the Training Room?"

"This is my cousin, Durgas," Olga said. "He just came over. I told him to wait here for me. I did not know of the rule. I thought maybe he could find some work here."

"Send him to Unemployment," Max barked. "Billy, I told you no visitors."

Rising to his feet with one of Olga's skates in his hands, Billy said, "I told them, Max." He set down the skate next to Olga and walked over to the man on the stool. "Mister, you got to get out of here."

"Please," Olga said to Max, "Durgas is a master woodcarver and machinist. And he works very cheap."

Max pricked up his ears. Gazing at Durgas, he spoke to Olga as though he assumed the mustachioed man couldn't understand English. "Can he fix muskets?"

"Durgas can fix anything," the man said.

Looking surprised that Durgas had understood him, Max exclaimed, "Then you're hired until we find Iggy. Then you're fired. Come with me and I'll show you what to do."

He strode out, and Durgas got up to follow him. Olga and Luisi exchanged triumphant smiles.

Twenty-one

In the locker room the chorus members were all discussing where to go for lunch. Someone said there was a diner only a block away, and general agreement was to go there. Michael asked Kris if she would like to walk there with him.

"I have something to do first," Kris told him. "But you can save me a seat next to you."

Kelly got an invitation from one of the chorus boys too, but also begged off, because she wanted to linger behind and talk to George Boyer. Kris and Kelly changed into their street clothes quickly, and together stepped from the locker room into the tunnel.

"I'm going to see if I can get a look at Billy's hands," Kris said. "Meet you in the lobby?"

"Okay," Kelly said. "I'll be talking to George Boyer."

Where the tunnel came out into the corridor circling the auditorium, they separated, Kris going left and Kelly going toward the lobby. Kris soon turned into the tunnel leading to the Training Room.

Max Brown came from the room just as Kris entered the tunnel; he was followed by a large man with a mustache waxed to sharp points and dressed in a dark suit and turtleneck sweater. Max nodded to Kris as they passed, but said nothing.

Kris eased open the Training Room door to peek in. Billy was kneeling before Olga, removing a skate. The other skate was already on the rubdown table she was seated on, next to her. Luisi, standing next to the other table, had both of his skates off and was wiping the blades with a paper towel.

This was no time to confer with Billy, Kris realized. She eased the door closed again. Moments later, as she started past the tunnel leading to the locker room, Kris realized she had left her purse in her locker. She turned into the tunnel.

Noticing the light streaming out of a doorway, Kris, unthinking, passed the locker-room door and approached the second door. It was the entrance to the Equipment Room. Halting outside—and realizing her error—she was about to trudge back when she saw Max Brown and a large, mustachioed, darkish-skinned man inside. They were standing before the workbench, Max with one of the muskets in his hands, explaining something to the big man. Puzzled, Kris walked back to the locker room and got her purse.

On leaving the room, moments later, Kris saw Max just emerging from the Equipment Room, further down the tunnel. Waiting for him, she let Max fall in at her side, and asked, "What's with him—the big man in the Equipment Room?"

"His name is Durgas," Max said. "He's a cousin of Olga's from Poland. A master woodcarver and master machinist. I hired him in Iggy's place."

"Iggy's out sick?" Kris inquired.

"Who knows?" Max said, waving his arms. "He ain't here, the muskets ain't done like he said they would be and he never phoned me to tell me they weren't."

"You mean he's missing?" Kris asked.

"What he is, is out drunk!" Max said darkly. "About every six months he drops everything and goes on a bat. It's been about six months since the last one. But he picked a hell of a time!"

In the lobby the new security guard was letting out some chorus members when Kelly arrived. She waited until he had locked the door behind them, then smiled at him. He smiled back interestedly.

"How's Paul coming along?" Kelly asked, her tone suggesting that the question was merely an excuse to start a conversation.

"He's still got a high temperature," the scar-faced man said. "Be out a few more days."

"One of the chorus members said she tried to phone him to find out how he was, and his landlady said he wasn't there. Is he in a hospital?"

After a momentary hesitation the big security guard responded. "He's staying at my house."

"Oh, your wife takes care of him?"

"My sister. I have no wife."

"Oh?" Kelly said in an interested tone. "Coincidentally, I'm not married either."

After considering this, he said tentatively, "Maybe we could get together sometime. For dinner, maybe?"

"I'd love it," Kelly said with enthusiasm. "But not until after opening night. Rehearsals are so exhausting that I want to do is go home to bed." After a pause she went on, "The chorus wants to send your cousin a Get Well card. May I have the address?"

Kelly wasn't sure that there was another hesitation. If there was, it was so short that it was undetectable. He said, "Why don't you just give the card to me, and save a stamp?"

"That's the lazy way. He'll appreciate it more if it comes in the mail."

This time there was definitely a hesitation. Finally he said, "I live in the Valley. Sepulveda. Sixteen-one-one-one Plummer Street."

Mentally filing the address, Kelly said, "I'll pick up a card on my lunch hour, and get it in the mail tonight."

Kris and Max Brown came along. "Here's my girlfriend," Kelly announced. "Will you let us out?"

"Sure," the security guard said, moving to unlock the door.

Max went to lunch too, but the diner was beneath his epicurean tastes. He headed for the parking lot for his car, and the girls turned in the opposite direction to walk to the diner.

"See Billy?" Kelly asked.

Kris shook her head. "He was helping Olga off

with her skates. Special treatment for the ingenue, I guess. I found out something, though. We've had another disappearance."

"Who?"

"Iggy Svensen. Max thinks he's just out on a drunk. Seems he goes on one every six months, and the six months since the last one are up. Fortunately a master craftsman named Durgas showed up to replace Iggy. Cousin of Olga's, visiting her from Poland."

"Another cousin?" Kelly said.

"Yeah. Seems every time somebody disappears, he's replaced by somebody's cousin. How'd you make out with George Boyer?"

"He says Paul is at his house, being nursed by his sister. I told him the chorus wanted to send a Get Well card, and asked for the address. I sort of had to pry the address out of him, but that may be because he was afraid I'd drop by and discover he has a wife. He claims to be single, and is sort of after me. He asked me out to dinner."

"But you did get an address?"

"Oh, yes. In Sepulveda."

By this time they had reached the diner. They went in and joined the rest of the group.

Durgas waited until he was reasonably sure most everybody had left for lunch, then went out to the lobby. He found Kalik alone.

"I'm in," he said to the security guard. "Where did you put my case?"

"Hid it in the storeroom. Follow me."

He took Durgas to the arena storeroom, removed some packages of paper towels from a shelf and drew a battered leather suitcase from behind them.

Durgas carried the suitcase to the Equipment Room, locked the door and laid the suitcase on Iggy's workbench. Opening the case, he lifted out the barrels and the firing mechanisms of the two repeating rifles that Olga and Luisi had used on the makeshift firing range in the Santa Monica Mountains. Both the front and rear sights had been removed from the bar-

rels. There was also a set of gunsmith's tools in the suitcase.

Durgas set one of the muskets in the workbench vise, disconnected the barrel and tried one of the rifle barrels in the groove carved in the stock. The groove was too small. With a reamer he gouged out more wood and tried the barrel again. This time it fitted. Setting the barrel aside, he removed the musket's trigger mechanism and began gouging out room in the stock for the firing mechanism of the repeating rifle.

He continued to work until five minutes of one, when he figured the Ice Follies members would start returning from lunch. Then he put his tools, the repeating-rifle barrels and the firing mechanisms back in the suitcase, hid the suitcase in a cabinet and unlocked and opened the door.

A few minutes later, when Max Brown stuck his head in the door, Durgas was loading one of the umbrella-type devices into the barrel of one of the muskets.

Twenty-two

By mid-afternoon Kris was so exhausted that Michael took pity on her and called it a day. Alvin kept the rest of the crew working, though. Kelly was reaching the point of exhaustion too, when they got to another rehearsal of the finale.

As they still didn't have their muskets, the chorus and duo again had to simulate aiming and firing. Alvin chanted, "Port arms! One-two-three and up muskets, point right, pull the trigger and— Out of sight!"

The chorus line and the two stars, in front of it,

were facing west. Olga and Luisi made a turn that faced them east.

"Wait, wait, wait—exclamation point!" Alvin called. "What is this, children?"

Olga and Luisi both gave him an abashed look. Alvin called to the others, "Take five," and skated over to the two stars.

"Your positioning was way off," Alvin said.

Luisi apologized. "Sorry. We forgot."

"Forgot! Forgot! 'Forgot' is for amateurs."

"It won't happen again," Olga reassured him. "We just got our directions mixed."

Kris had changed out of her clown outfit and skates, and had been standing at the edge of the tunnel watching the skaters. Kelly skated over to her.

"That's the first time they've goofed," Kelly said.

"Well, they're only human," Kris said philosophically.

"I wonder," Kelly said.

Kris regarded her curiously. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know exactly. It's like I said before, their arrival here, knowing all the routines, was very fortuitous."

"You think they could be involved in what's going on?" Kris asked.

"Until we figure out what *is* going on, there's no way to tell, *is there?*"

"I guess not," Kris agreed. "While you watch those two, I'm going to try Billy again. If he's got Sabrina's teeth marks on his hand, we'll know he was the one Sabrina took a bite on in Helene's apartment."

"Be careful," Kelly advised.

"Believe it," Kris said as she walked off.

Max Brown, who had been sitting in one of the front-row seats, got up and came over to Kelly as Kris walked up the tunnel. Looking after Kris and shaking his head, he said, "A skater she isn't."

"That shuffle-slide you do on the ice in your shoes isn't exactly professional either," Kelly said, smiling at him.

"So who claims he can skate?" Max asked with a shrug.

He turned and started to walk back to his seat, but Kelly stopped him by saying, "Max."

"Yeah?" he asked, turning.

"Tell me something. The file that was broken into in your office the other night, what was in it?"

"Nothing worth stealing," Max said with another shrug. "Just a floor plan of the audience seating sections."

"Seating sections?"

"Yeah, who sits where. Why do you ask?"

"I'll let you know when I know," Kelly said, not at all sure why she had asked.

Alvin called, "All right, children, back on the ice!"

Kris found Billy Brinks in the Training Room alone, seated on one of the rubdown tables, reading a comic book. When she came in, he jumped down from the table and smiled at her.

"Hi, Billy," she said. "I've got a charley horse in my right calf."

Pointing to the rubdown table he had just gotten off, Billy said, "On your tummy." Peering at her legs, he saw she was wearing no stockings, and nodded in satisfaction.

Kris was dressed in a skirt and sweater. Slipping off her shoes, she lay on the table on her stomach. Billy began kneading the calf of her right leg.

"Have it out in a jiffy," he said. "Does it hurt?"

"Not much," Kris said truthfully.

After a few minutes Kris added, "Okay, Billy, you've got it out."

Billy stopped his kneading and she sat up. He knelt to put on her shoes for her.

When he stood up, Kris said, "You have strong hands," took them in hers and turned them over to look at the palms.

"Why are you looking at my hands?" he asked puzzledly.

Dropping them, Kris said with a smile, "I heard someone bit you. I'm glad to see they didn't."

"Why would anybody bite Billy?" he asked in a bewildered voice.

"Right. Why would they?"

When Kris made no move to get down off the rub-down table, Billy gazed at her, trying to think of something to say. Finally he asked, "Did you know Helene?"

"No, but I hear she's very nice."

"She was."

"Was?" Kris asked with raised brows.

Billy's face contorted and he turned away. With his back to her, he said, "Sometimes things don't turn out the way they should. You know what I mean?"

"I think I do, Billy."

Spinning back to face her, he said, "You're the only new one who is nice. I don't like those other two—Olga and Luisi."

"Between you and me, Billy, I don't like them much either," Kris said in a confidential tone.

Pleased at finding her a kindred spirit, he smiled widely. "Do you like spaghetti with meatballs?" he asked abruptly.

Somewhat taken aback, Kris said, "Were we talking about meatballs?"

"I cook the best."

"Ah, you like to cook."

"I love to cook spaghetti with meatballs," Billy said.

"That's all?"

"No, I also cook meatballs with spaghetti."

Laughing, Kris began to see why Max Brown kept Billy Brinks around. He was rather like a big, friendly dog. "I love a change of pace," she said.

"Want me to cook for you?" he asked eagerly. "The meatballs are really small. I put four of them in my mouth at once."

"Four in your mouth at one time?" she asked in a tone of admiration.

"For you, five. Please?"

"Who could say no to five meatballs," Kris said.

"When?"

"This evening?"

"It's a date," she said. "Where?"

"My place. It's only four blocks from here. I got a nice apartment. It's only one room, but it's clean."

"I'll bet it is," Kris said. "What time do you get off work?"

"Early today. Max said Alvin's gonna cut rehearsal about four-thirty, because they started so early."

"Suppose I pick you up here at five?" Kris suggested.

"Okay," Billy agreed.

She jumped down off the rubdown table. "See you then, Billy," she said, and went on out.

Alvin was just calling another five-minute break when Kris got back to the rink. Kelly skated over to give Kris an inquiring look.

"Billy doesn't have any teeth marks on his hands," Kris reported. "He's invited me for a spaghetti-and-meatball dinner at his apartment this evening."

"You going?"

"Sure. Maybe I can find out who paid him the money Sabrina saw. I'm picking him up at five. Incidentally, he says Max told him Alvin is cutting rehearsal off at four-thirty today, because it started so early."

Kelly looked at her watch. "It's only three-thirty now. Hope I can hold out for another hour."

When Kris got back to the Sports Arena at five o'clock, Billy was waiting for her in the parking lot. He directed Kris to a rather shabby apartment building only a few blocks away, and they walked up to the third floor.

The apartment was what is known in Southern California as a bachelor apartment. It consisted of one large room with a kitchen alcove off of it. To one side of the alcove was the bathroom, to the other side a closet. The room also held a sagging sofa bed, a couple of cheap, plastic-covered armchairs, a chrome-

and-vinyl kitchen table with four matching chairs, and a portable TV. The only thing distinctive about the place was that the walls were plastered with photographs of Helene Robinson, most of them publicity photos of her on skates, performing various turns and spins. However, there was one framed portrait photograph of her in a dress. It was on an end table, and was signed, "Love, Helene."

Billy got a two-liter jug of California rosé wine from the refrigerator and poured two water glasses full. Handing Kris one, he said, "Now you got to excuse me for a while, because I got to make the sauce and meatballs. You want the television on?"

Kris shook her head. "I'll talk to you while you cook."

It took him an hour to get dinner ready, but it was worth waiting for. His spaghetti and meatballs were excellent. By dinnertime Billy had consumed two glasses of wine, while Kris still had her glass half full. He got down two more during dinner, and by the time they finished eating, his tongue was becoming thick.

Regarding Kris' wineglass, which still had a little in it, he said, "You don't eat or drink much. I eat and drink a lot, because I'm big."

"Seems fair," Kris said.

"Helene loved the meatballs," Billy said wistfully. "She was a lot of fun."

"You really liked her a lot, didn't you, Billy?"

"Yeah."

"Did you love her?"

Billy looked pained. He emptied his wineglass and poured more wine into it before answering. "Before she went with *him*, maybe. Jack Ward, I mean. Then I didn't love her much anymore. She had no right to go with him. He's married." His tone became agitated. "Don't tell anybody I love her. Don't do it. I don't want that."

Slightly uneasy at his sudden agitation, Kris said, "I won't, Billy."

Heaving himself to his feet, he glared at her. "I don't want anybody to think that Billy is stupid."

Lumbering across the room, he picked up Helene's autographed portrait and hurled it to the floor, smashing the glass. Then he fell to his knees next to it, turned it faceup and gazed at it in contrition. Tears spilled down his cheeks.

"It was my fault," he said. "I did it. They weren't supposed to take her, just him. Not her. They lied."

He was in the mood to tell everything, Kris realized. Kneeling next to him, she put an arm about his shaking shoulders. "Who lied, Billy?"

Rising to his feet with the glassless photograph in his hands, Billy tenderly set it back on the end table. "They did," he said in a hopeless voice.

Also rising to her feet, Kris sank onto the sofa. "Who are 'they'?"

Billy covered his eyes with his hands and made no answer.

"Who took Helene?" Kris pushed. "Who are they?"

Billy sank to his knees before her. "They said they'd take him, not her," he mumbled. "Just him."

Laying her hand on his head, she asked, "Who said, Billy? Tell me what happened. I'm your friend. You can tell me."

"I don't know," he sobbed. "They called on the phone and said leave the door open, and they'd give me money and take Jack away. He was married. He was bad for her. They said they'd give me money, and I'd be able to buy Helene a present."

"Who are 'they'?"

"I don't know!" he screamed in torment. "They threw the money out of a big black car. They lied. They said they wouldn't touch Helene. They lied. Everything always changes. The world stinks. The ice is melting. It's too soft out there."

Billy buried his head in her lap and his shoulders shook with his sobbing.

"Billy," Kris said, "the people who threw money out of the car, did you see their faces?"

His voice muffled by her lap, he said, "No, no, I couldn't see them. They promised not to touch her."

"Billy, if you didn't see them, did you hear a name? Anything?"

"No, I didn't see, I didn't hear. They lied to me. And Helene's gone, and it's my fault. Oh God, it's all my fault."

He knew no more than he had told, Kris realized. Gently she stroked his head and let him cry himself out.

Eventually he drew back, heaved himself to his feet and looked down at her contritely.

"Billy is sorry," he said. "He made a big baby of himself."

"It's all right for a man to cry when something makes him sad," Kris told him. "Billy, I'm going to try to get Helene back from the people who took her. Can you think of anything at all that might help?"

Concentrating, Billy finally said, "I know what the voice on the phone sounded like."

"Was it distinctive?" Kris asked. "Unusual in any way?"

Billy shook his head. "Just an ordinary voice, but it sounded just like George Boyer, the new security guard."

Twenty-three

The next day the angels all received early-morning calls from Bosley informing them that the usual morning meeting would be at Max Brown's office instead of in Beverly Hills. When they arrived, Bosley was again behind Max's desk and Max was, as usual, pacing the floor.

Bosley dialed Charlie Townsend and reported that everyone was present.

"Good morning, angels," Charlie's voice said. "Morning, Max."

The angels chorused a "Good morning, Charlie," and Max said sourly, "Glad you left the 'good' off for me, because it ain't. You girls making any progress?"

"I'm not," Sabrina said. "Charlie, I visited every consulate in Los Angeles yesterday. Guess how many have black limousines with 'Diplomat' plates?"

"I give up, Sabrina," Charlie's voice said from the squawk box.

"Eight."

"Black limousines must be a preferred form of transportation for diplomats," Charlie said ruefully. "Thanks for the effort, anyway."

"You're welcome, Charlie. I have nothing else to report."

"Kelly?" Charlie asked.

"I talked to the new security guard, Charlie. I guess he really is Paul Boyer's cousin. He said Paul is staying with him, being nursed by his sister. George's sister, that is, not Paul's. I got the address from him on the pretext that the chorus members wanted to send a Get Well card."

"What is the address?"

"Sixteen-one-one-one Plummer Street, in Sepulveda."

"That's in the San Fernando Valley," Charlie said. "I'll check it out to see if Paul is actually there. Anything else?"

"Nothing definite. I'm a little suspicious of Luisi Spivak and Olga Czerniak."

"My new stars?" Max said, waving his arms. "You're going to ruin my show by exposing my new stars as criminals?"

"It's only suspicion, Max," Kelly explained. "I just think it's funny that such expert skaters were so conveniently waiting in the wings. Why would two top skaters like Luisi and Olga be unemployed?"

"They just came over from Poland," Max said. "They're on visitor's visas."

"A phone call to the Polish Embassy in Washington could settle how long they've been here, Charlie," Bosley said.

"Yes," Charlie agreed. "I'll make the call."

"While you're calling, you might check up on Olga's cousin," Kris suggested. "He's supposed to be just over from Poland too, and Max just hired him to replace the regular prop man, Iggy Svensen."

"Who's the cousin?" Charlie asked. "And what happened to Svensen?"

"He went off on a drunk," Max said.

"You don't know that, Max," Kris objected. "You're just guessing. Charlie, he disappeared, just like Helene Robinson and Jack Ward."

"And Paul Boyer," Sabrina added.

"Paul didn't disappear," Kelly said. "He's at his cousins's house in Sepulveda."

"Maybe," Sabrina said.

"That question will be settled quickly," Charlie said. "I'll personally check out the Plummer Street address. What is Olga's cousin's name?"

"Durgas," Max said. "Whether that's a first or last name, I didn't ask. Wait a minute."

Opening the door to his private office, he asked the girl in the outer office, "You have Durgas fill out that employment sheet?"

"Yes, sir," she said.

"What's his full name?"

There was a pause while she located the form. "Veechek Durgas," she said. "He told me Veechek was Polish for Vincent."

Closing the door again, Max asked, "You hear that, Charlie?"

"Yes, Max. Strange. Veecheck is certainly a Polish name, but Durgas doesn't sound like a Polish surname."

"He doesn't look Polish either," Kris said. "Looks more like an Arab."

"I'll check him out with the Polish Embassy," Char-

lie said. "Kris, do you have anything else to report?"

"First," Kris said, "Billy Brinks doesn't have Sabrina's teeth marks on his hand. Second, I had dinner at Billy's apartment last night. Spaghetti and meatballs. It was quite good."

"Did you accomplish anything other than easing your hunger?"

"Quite a bit. Billy admitted leaving the Sports Arena door unlocked so that the kidnappers of Robinson and Ward could get in while he was out after coffee. They had promised him they were only going to take Jack, and wouldn't touch Helene. He wept that they double-crossed him. He kept saying it was all his fault."

"I'll kill him!" Max raged. "After all I've done for him, he sold out for thirty pieces of silver."

"He didn't do it for the money, Max," Kris said. "At least not entirely. And the only reason he wanted the money was to buy a present for Helene. He did it mainly to get rid of Jack Ward. He thought Ward was bad for Helene, because he's married."

"Who paid Brinks?" Bosley asked.

"He says it was a voice on the phone. Coincidentally, one that sounded similar to the new security guard's. Poor Billy. He is so filled with pain and guilt."

Weaving in and out among the angels' chairs and waving his arms in the air, Max grumbled agitatedly, "The question is, who are the people who called and paid him to set up the kidnapping? Who—what *are* they?"

"He says he doesn't know."

Halting to stare at her, Max said, "He *has* to know."

"He says he doesn't know," Kris repeated. "And I believe him. There's no point in having him arrested. He doesn't really understand what he's done, and he still might be able to help us."

"We do know one thing," Kelly said. "We know who to watch."

"We do?" Bosley said.

"The convenient replacements," Kelly said. "Olga and Luisi."

"And her cousin, Durgas, who fixes things," Kris said. "I'll bet he made up that first name of Veechek. He looks about as Polish as King Hussein."

"Okay," Max said, throwing his arms wide. "Finished. Closed. I shut down the show and we call the cops and arrest all of them!"

"What about the show must go on, Max?" Charlie's voice asked.

"What are you talking? No show must go on when human beings are at stake."

"But, Max," Sabrina said, "we don't have any tangible evidence for an arrest."

Facing her, he asked, "So what do we do?"

"The only thing we can do. Keep trying to get evidence."

"They'll make their move, and we'll be there," Kelly said.

"You hope," Max said. "All right, it's in your hands. I turn my fate over to you. May it not hang heavy on your heads if someone gets killed. Like *me*."

Twenty-four

Durgas had worked a good part of the night in the equipment room, and he got back to the Sports Arena again early in the morning. Kalik had loaned him his key to get in, instructing him to return it when he himself reported to work as security guard at noon.

Shortly after seven AM. Billy Brinks stuck his head in the door of the Equipment Room, apparently just to check on who was working so early in the morning,

because he said nothing and immediately withdrew it again.

Durgas finished with the muskets at ten A.M. Lining them up on the workbench, he tested them one at a time. For all but the last two he tested, a flag popped out each time he pulled the trigger. With the last two, there were merely metallic clicks when the triggers were pulled. He had just tucked the flags back into the musket muzzles when the door opened and Max Brown bustled in.

"Alvin called early rehearsal again, Yurgas," he said. "They start in—"

"Durgas!" the new prop man interrupted.

"—five minutes, and they haven't had a musket in their hands yet."

The door opened again and Alvin stormed in. "Does anyone realize we open tomorrow night?" he asked. "I promised I wouldn't show my face in here again, but meanwhile we have skaters and no muskets. Now, what are your plans, Durgas?"

"The muskets are ready," Durgas said.

"Finally!" Alvin said in a pleased voice, going over to reach for one.

Durgas lay his hand on the musket stock, preventing Alvin from picking it up. "No."

Alvin and Max both stared at him in surprise. "What are you talking, no?" Max asked. "Are they ready or not, and if not, you're fired, Mugdas—and don't tell me your name."

"I fixed them," Durgas said stolidly. "I give them out."

"What is he talking about, Max?" Alvin asked fretfully, again reaching for one of the muskets.

Durgas' huge hand again blocked the way. "I made them," he said in a definite tone. "I hand them out."

Throwing up his arms, Max moaned, "Just what I need for dress rehearsal, a temperamental repairman." To Alvin he said, "Let him, let him!"

Max walked out, shaking his head. Alvin glared at Durgas.

"All right, get them out to rinkside," Alvin said. He stalked out also.

Durgas loaded the muskets onto a tablelike cart and wheeled it along the tunnel to the edge of the rink.

Clapping his hands, Alvin called, "All right, children. The muskets are over here. Come get them and we'll run through the finale with the props for a change."

The two stars and the chorus line skated over to line up and receive their muskets. Durgas handed out each musket individually. When all had been handed out, Alvin called for music and put the group through the finale.

Alvin didn't chant his usual accompaniment to the drill, but allowed the music to cue the skaters. When the time came for the musket salute, all of the muskets came up in unison. Flags popped from the muzzles of all but those of Luisi and Olga.

"Stop, stop!" Alvin shouted. "What is this?"

Skating over to the two stars, he took their muskets from them. "Where are the flags?" he asked, trying the triggers and finding both guns uncocked.

Luisi and Olga both shrugged. "I pulled the trigger," Olga said. "Nothing happened."

"So did I," Luisi said.

Alvin skated over to the edge of the tunnel, where Durgas waited next to his cart. Thrusting the two muskets at the new prop man, he said, "All right, big shot. So where are the flags for our featured skaters?"

Taking the two muskets and laying them on the cart, Durgas said, "I haven't put them in yet. Don't worry, they'll be ready for the performance."

Glaring at him, Alvin said, "If you were Chinese, this would be the Year of the Turkey."

Kelly skated over to where Kris, in her clown costume, was waiting for Michael to tell her what to do.

In a low voice Kelly said, "This is my first look at the new prop man. Do you remember Bree's descrip-

tion of the man she ran into in the hall in front of Helene's apartment?"

Kris nodded. "Said he was a big fellow with a thick, waxed mustache, and—" Coming to a startled halt, she gazed over at the new prop man. "Hey, you think—?"

When she came to a halt again, Kelly said, "I think it's pretty coincidental. I also think I'll keep a close eye on Mr. Veechek Durgas."

Again, because of the early start, Alvin called finish to rehearsal at 4:30. Michael kept Kris over for additional practice on their clown routines, which left Kelly without a ride, since she had come in Kris's car. Kelly told Kris not to worry about it, that she would catch a taxicab.

Sweated up from the exhausting hours of rehearsal, Kelly decided to have a shower before changing back into the slacks and sweater she had worn to work. That made her the last member of the chorus line out of the building when she emerged about a quarter after five.

Mason Fairchild, the resident panhandler, was standing outside the door when she came out. Bowing formally, he said, "Excuse me, young lady, may I share some relevant information with you?"

Kelly stopped, thinking of the information Sabrina had managed to get from the man. "It's a possibility."

A little startled that someone was actually going to stop and listen to him, Fairchild said, "It is?" After a pause, during which he searched his mind for relevant information, he said, "Oh, well. Ummm. Considering the water shortage in this country, don't you think it is our patriotic duty to drink wine? Domestic, of course."

Opening her purse to search for a dollar bill, Kelly said, "Tell me, have you seen a large black limousine lately?"

"You're the second lady asking," he said. Then he suddenly snatched the bill from her hand and lowered his voice to a whisper. "Don't look now, but it just

pulled up over your shoulder. I think you lady limousine-lovers may just save America." Again he bowed formally. "Off to the wine cellars."

As the panhandler walked off down the street, Kelly turned to look at the limousine that had just pulled up in front of the building. It had smoked-glass windows that made it impossible to see inside, and its license plate read "DIPLOMAT."

At that moment, the front door of the arena opened and the new security guard and new prop man emerged together. The former had changed out of his uniform and wore a dark suit and turtleneck sweater similar to Durgas'.

The two gave Kelly polite nods as they went by. They opened the rear door of the limousine and climbed in.

As the elegant car silently pulled away and rounded the first corner to the right, Kelly had two thoughts. She wondered how the security guard had gotten away so early, when he was supposed to stay until the building was empty; Kris and Michael were still on the rink. Her second thought was that she would lose a golden opportunity if she didn't follow the limousine.

She looked around for a cruising taxi, but none was in sight. However, a Honda motorcycle was just approaching.

It was not an ordinary Honda. It had foxtails, brass horns, reflectors and chrome exhaust pipes. The rider was just as flamboyant. About twenty, he was coal black, wore a black leather jacket studded with silver buttons, black jeans tucked into black cowboy boots inlaid with silver, a white scarf similar to those worn by World War I pilots, chrome-rimmed goggles and a red helmet with "JoJo" lettered on its front. Another helmet was hooked to the otherwise-empty pack platform behind the seat.

Jumping into the street, Kelly held up a palm. The under sized motorcycle came to a halt and the driver looked at her.

"What's happening, sister?" he inquired.

"Emergency, baby!" Kelly said with urgency. "I need some help, and I mean now."

"Like what?"

Pointing to the corner, Kelly said, "Big, black limousine just turned the corner. Can we get behind it for twenty bucks?"

Grinning widely, the black man said, "I can definitely get behind 'Follow that car.' Get on, honey. Big, bad, black limo, watch out, 'cause here comes big, bad, black JoJo on your downtown side."

Grabbing the second helmet and pulling it over her head, Kelly jumped onto the pack platform and put her arms about JoJo's waist. The motorcycle roared off and spun around the corner.

The big car was not in sight. As they roared past an intersection, Kelly looked both ways without spotting it. But as they passed another, she saw it receding off to the right, a block away.

Yelling, "There!" she pointed to the right.

By then they were past the intersection. JoJo spun in a tight U-turn directly in front of an oncoming semi. He and Kelly both leaned into the turn to keep from overturning, and JoJo dragged one foot. Sparks flew from the pavement as his metal-tapped heel acted as a partial brake. The truck's air horn blasted and its air brakes hissed. The motorcycle spun out of its way an inch before collision and sped along the intersecting street after the limousine.

Kelly cautiously opened her squeezed-shut eyes and emitted a relieved breath that she was still alive.

They were now on a main street, and traffic was heavy. Two blocks farther on they halted behind a double line of vehicles that were backed up for a red light for three-fourths of a block.

Peering over JoJo's shoulder, Kelly said, "I can't see them."

He said, "If they're there, honeyface, JoJo's going to find them."

He began to weave in and out among the cars. The light turned green and traffic began to move again,

but JoJo continued weaving. Horns blasted as he cut dangerously close in front of the vehicles.

Ahead was what looked like an impossible squeeze between a truck and a van. Kelly took her right hand from around the black man's waist and put it over her eyes as he gunned toward the narrow passage between the two vehicles. They whisked through by a hair, to the tune of horn blasts from both the truck and the van.

The cars ahead of them halted for another light. JoJo stopped, two cars back from the intersection, and glanced over his shoulder. Kelly's hand was still pressed to her eyes. When he poked her with his elbow, she cautiously spread the fingers enough to peek through. Then she lowered her hand, for she saw the black limousine two cars ahead. She smiled into JoJo's turned face, and he made the okay sign with his thumb and forefinger.

After that, daredevil driving was unnecessary. The limousine proceeded at a sedate speed, and the motorcycle tailed it from a quarter-block back.

The limousine turned onto Wilshire Boulevard and drove west a few blocks, finally pulling into the parking lot of a restaurant. Four men were getting out of the car as the motorcycle approached. In addition to the new prop man and the new security guard, Kelly saw a large man with a pushed-in nose and an equally large man with two gold front teeth, both dressed in the same type of dark suit and turtleneck sweater as the other two.

Ducking her head onto JoJo's shoulder on the opposite side from the men, Kelly said into his ear, "Keep going."

JoJo went as far as the corner, turned and stopped the motorcycle next to the sidewalk. From there they could see the restaurant's front door. The four men were just filing through it. When the last had disappeared inside, JoJo asked, "Now what?"

"Go on around the block and drop me in front," Kelly said.

JoJo swung around the block and stopped in front

of the restaurant. Dismounting, Kelly removed her helmet and hooked it back onto the pack stand by its strap. She looked up at the sign over the restaurant door. It read "HAJ HAYA'S."

"Arab place," JoJo offered. "Out of my price range, but I hear the grub is almost up to soul food."

Smiling at him, Kelly delved into her purse, brought out a twenty-dollar bill and gave it to him. "JoJo," she said, "you are dynamite!"

Tucking the bill into his jacket pocket, JoJo said, "I always wanted to play cops and robbers and be the good guy for a change. I assume *they're* the bad guys."

"Definitely."

"Need any help from a brother?" he inquired. "If it gets me off, I won't even charge."

"Thanks," she said. "But the next move is mine."

Shrugging, he replied, "Okay, and don't talk bad about me when I'm gone."

With a wide grin, Kelly said, "Anybody asks me about JoJo, he's the best."

"You got potential, sister," JoJo said with an equally wide grin. "Later."

He blasted off on his Honda in a cloud of style, beeping and honking his horns in a goodbye salute, foxtails flying.

Twenty-five

Entering the restaurant, Kelly looked around warily. The decor was Arabian. A number of customers were seated at tables, but she didn't see the four men who had just come in. A hostess in Arabian dress approached her.

"One, miss?" she asked.

"I was to meet a friend, but I don't see her," Kelly improvised. "Where is your restroom?"

"Through the bar and to the right," the hostess told her.

Entering the bar, Kelly stood for a moment, letting her vision adjust to the dim light, then scanned the tables in there. The four men were not in the bar either. She went on through it into the hallway where the restrooms were located. Beyond them she spotted a doorway with a beaded drape covering it, and approached it quietly. From inside she heard the murmur of male voices, and among them picked out that of the new security guard, George Boyer. She was too far away to make out what was being said, however.

Suddenly the drape parted and a huge man stepped outside. Turbaned and bare to the waist, he wore a red sash, billowing black pantaloons and red slippers with upturned toes. He had a fierce black mustache and carried a huge, curved scimitar.

Kelly immediately became a tourist. In an accent straight from Nebraska, she said, "Well, hello there! My, aren't you something? My, my, what a fine figure of a man. Excuse me."

She started to walk around his right side. He leaned over and his bulk stopped her.

Gazing up at him ingenuously, Kelly said, "You don't understand. You see, back home in Box Butte, Nebraska—I guess you haven't heard of it, but we who live there care—I told my first cousin, Irma-Dean, I said when I travel, I'm going to see every sight and eat every exotic dish. So if you'll excuse me, sir, I understand there's some good vittles in that direction."

She started to move around his other side, but he blocked her way again.

"Room is private," he said stolidly.

The curtain parted again and a woman came out. Barefoot, she wore gauzy, transparent pants, bunched at the ankles, a skimpy halter and a veil that concealed all of her face but her eyes. Bells at her wrists and ankles made her tinkle as she walked.

Looking after the woman as she went by, Kelly said, "Well, *she* came from that private room."

"She dancer," he said.

Kelly watched the woman enter the ladies' room. Turning back to smile up at the huge guard, she said, "I want to thank you, sir, for being so kind and courteous. I'll be sure to talk about you to first cousin Irma-Dean now."

About-facing, she headed for the ladies' room. The guard watched until she entered it, then retreated back through the beaded drape into the private dining room.

There was no one in the ladies' room, but at its far end was a door lettered "Employees only." Kelly tried the knob, found the door unlocked and opened it. It gave onto a medium-sized dressing room containing a couple of lockers, a mirrored dressing table loaded with creams and makeup, and a battered sofa. The belly dancer was seated before the mirror, her veil off, repairing her eye makeup.

The two women looked at each other. The dancer was about her size, Kelly noted, and had a similar figure. Her hair wasn't as long or as soft as Kelly's, but was of similar color.

Closing the door behind her, Kelly asked, "How would you like to make fifty dollars?"

Kelly emerged from the ladies' room in the belly dancer's costume: low-slung, diaphanous pantaloons, skimpy halter, the half-veil, bells at her ankles and wrists and gold rings on her bare big toes. The huge Arab guard with the scimitar paid no attention to her when she pushed through the beaded drapes into the private dining room.

The room was not large, containing only one low, round table with sitting pillows instead of chairs around it. The four men from the limousine were seated at it, eating Arabic food with their fingers. Off in a corner a trio in Arab gowns played discordant Mid-Eastern music. Two of the musicians plucked the strings of guitarlike instruments, the third played a flutelike

wooden pipe, fingering the holes with his right hand only, as he beat a tabor in his lap with the palm and fingers of his left hand.

A sitting pillow lay alongside the orchestra. Sinking onto it, Kelly tried to look inconspicuous.

The music was too loud for Kelly to hear more than snatches of conversation from the table, as she was about ten feet away from it. But a few moments after she sat down, the piece the trio was playing ended. Before they started another piece, she managed to overhear a couple of sentences.

The gold-toothed man said to the security guard who was supposed to be George Boyer, "How did you get away from work so early, Kalik?"

"Kalik," Kelly noted. Not "George" or "Boyer." The man had to be an impostor.

The pseudo-George Boyer said, "The trainer for the Ice Follies, a dumbhead named Billy Brinks, is always there. And he has a key. Only two skaters were left on the rink. I told him to let them out."

The orchestra started up again, then, cutting off Kelly's hearing the conversation. After that she only heard occasional snatches.

She heard the prop man, Durgas, say something about Section D-East, but couldn't catch what he said about it. Then she caught a full three sentences from the fake George Boyer when the music momentarily softened. He said, "There is no room for error. Everything depends on timing. It must be finished in ten seconds." An increase in the volume of the music drowned out whatever else the man said.

Kelly now became conscious that the man with the gold front teeth was examining her admiringly. Momentarily switching his attention to the musicians, he clapped his hands three times and nodded at Kelly. The trio abandoned the piece they were playing and swung into a loud, up-tempo dance rhythm.

When Kelly didn't rise to her feet, the other three men turned their attention to her also, alternately clapping in rhythm and signaling with upraised palms that they wanted her to dance. Feeling cornered, she

shook her head in indication that she would rather not. The four men clapped and gesticulated more demandingly. The flute player stopped blowing on the instrument long enough to give her a stern, commanding nod, the fingers of his left hand still drumming on the tabor. Kelly had no choice but to get up and begin dancing.

Fortunately Kelly had recently taken up belly dancing as a method of keeping her stomach flat; a local gym ran a course in it. Her technique therefore passed the critical scrutiny of both the customers and the orchestra members, all of whom presumably knew good belly dancing when they saw it. The four customers showed their appreciation of her technique by clapping in rhythm to her sensuous movements.

As the tempo steadily increased, Kelly's movements had to keep pace with it, until her body was writhing like that of a frenzied snake. Feeling her veil begin to slip, she made a grab for it, but too late to prevent its momentarily slipping down to her chin.

Three of the clapping men's eyes were fixed on her gyrating navel, but the mustachioed Durgas had his fixed on her face. She got the veil back in place almost instantly, but that wasn't soon enough.

Durgas leaned over to whisper to the scar-faced Kalik, who stopped clapping to stare at her again-veiled features. Kalik and Durgas both rose to their feet.

Kelly started to dance backward toward the door. When she reached it, she spun around to flee, only to find herself confronted by a huge bare chest. The Arab guard had stepped in front of the door, his hands clasped on the hilt of the scimitar, whose point rested on the floor between his outspread feet.

As Kelly gazed upward into his face, Kalik and Durgas grabbed her from either side. She tried karate, driving an elbow into the solar plexus of Durgas and simultaneously smashing the sole of her foot against Kalik's knee. Durgas didn't even grunt, but the shock to her elbow was as if she had cracked it against a board. She did get an irritated groan out of Kalik, but

the kick didn't seem to affect him. He only gripped her arm more tightly.

The music died.

The huge Arab guard asked puzzledly, "What is it?"

Jerking the veil from her face to show him that Kelly was not the restaurant's regular dancer, Kalik said throatily, "A thief, here to pick your customers' pockets. We'll turn her over to the police."

Staring down into Kelly's face with growing recognition, the guard simply moved aside.

Kalik called over his shoulder, "Faud, take care of the bill, then you and Grout meet us at the car."

He and Durgas hustled Kelly out of the room, Durgas' hand over her mouth. A door leading to the parking lot at the end of the hall was marked "EMERGENCY EXIT ONLY." Durgas cracked it open to peer out.

"Some people getting out of their car to come in," he said to Kalik. "Hold it." Moments later he said, "Now," opened the door wide and the two of them pushed Kelly through it.

No one else was on the lot at the moment. Kelly was hustled over to the black limousine and was hurled into the backseat. She wished that she had accepted JoJo's offer to help and had told him to stand by, but it was too late now.

Durgas slid in next to Kelly, Kalik rounded the car and got in on her other side. Durgas produced a .45 automatic and aimed it at Kelly's bare stomach.

"Make any noise and I'll give you a second belly button," he growled.

Kelly remained silent. Through the smoked one-way windows she could see out clearly, but she knew no one could see in to discover her plight. A couple leaving the restaurant passed right by the car without even glancing at it, got into a car parked only two slots away and drove off.

They sat without conversation for several minutes, until the gold-toothed man and the one with the pushed-in nose finally emerged from the restaurant by

the front door. The gold-toothed man climbed behind the wheel, and the other sat next to him. The car started, backed and drove off the lot.

"To the factory," Kalik ordered.

Twenty-six

At eight in the morning Kris' apartment phone interrupted her breakfast. It was John Bosley.

"Meeting's at the office instead of at Max's this morning," he said. "I reached Sabrina, but I get no answer at Kelly's house."

"Didn't she leave a message on the tape recorder?" Kris asked.

"No—which worries me. She's always good about that, even if she's only going out for a few minutes. Will you drive by to check her out en route?"

"Sure, Bosley," Kris said. "See you at nine."

When Kris arrived at the Beverly Hills office, Sabrina was there, but there was no sign of Kelly. Bosley shook his head when Kris asked if he had heard from her.

"She hasn't been home," Kris said. "Her bed hadn't been slept in, and her car was in the garage. She rode to work with me yesterday, but said she'd catch a taxi home, because I had to stay over to practice some clown routines with Michael."

"Looks as if she never got home," Sabrina said.

"Let's see what Charlie thinks," Bosley suggested. He dialed the number and got Charlie on the phone.

"Everyone there, Bosley?" Charlie's voice asked.

"Just Sabrina and Kris, Charlie. Kelly seems to be missing."

"Missing?"

"She didn't sleep in last night, Charlie," Kris said.
"Or out," Sabrina said. "They've got her, Charlie. Somehow they've got her. The people with the black limousine."

"How can we be sure?" Bosley asked.

"She didn't leave any messages on her tape recorder," Kris said. "You say she always does, Boz."

"She does," Charlie's voice said. "That isn't like Kelly. She would be there if she could. They have her, and we have to get her back fast."

"Where do we start looking, Charlie?"

"I have a couple of ready-made suspects. First, I phoned the Polish Embassy in Washington. They confirmed that Luisi Spivak and Olga Czerniak are here on visitor's visas, and have been in the United States less than a month. But they never heard of anyone named Veechek Durgas, and say that Durgas doesn't sound like a Polish name."

"I thought he was a phony," Kris affirmed.

"Not as phony as your new security guard," Charlie said. "That Plummer Street address in Sepulveda that Kelly gave me is the Veterans Administration Hospital."

"That gives us two people to watch," Sabrina said. "The show opens tonight. I've got a feeling Kelly's disappearance is somehow tied into that, and if we're ever going to see Kelly again, we'd better find out how. And quick."

"Right," Charlie said. "Kris, is rehearsal at ten this morning again?"

"Yes, Charlie."

"You and Sabrina had better both get over there. Keep an eye on both Durgas and the fake George Boyer. Kris won't be able to get away, Sabrina, but if either leaves, follow him. Maybe he'll lead you to Kelly."

"Right, Charlie. I'll do that."

"Meantime, Sabrina, I'll be making arrangements for you and Bosley to be at the arena tonight during the performance, in case this thing hasn't been broken before then."

"In what capacity, Charlie?" Bosley asked.

"I'll have to check that out with Max, Bosley," Charlie said. "But rest assured that I'll get you in somehow."

"When will we know?"

"I'll call Max right now, then phone you back."

"All right, Charlie," Bosley said. "We'll be waiting."

As Bosley hung up the phone, Kris spoke. "I won't wait for his callback. I ought to get over to the arena. Incidentally, Sabrina, take a good look at our new prop man, Durgas, when you get to the arena."

"Why?" Sabrina asked.

"From your description of the man you met in the hallway in front of Helene's apartment, Kelly thinks it may be the same man."

Ten minutes after Kris left, Charlie phoned back. "It's all set," he said. "Bosley, you and Sabrina stop by Max's office as soon as you can get there, and he'll accompany you to the arena to arrange with the security guard for you to have free access to the building."

"In what capacity?" Bosley asked.

"You'll have a couple of concessions for tonight. Sabrina will be selling programs, you'll be hawking candy and popcorn. Gives you both excuses to move about in the audience at will."

When Kris and Michael came from the locker room in their clown costumes, Alvin Queen already had the other skaters lined up.

"This is our last chance to get out the kinks," he was telling them. "Let's take it from the opening number and go right through." Then he frowned. "Where is Kelly? We open tonight, and she's late. She's not so good that she can be late like a prima donna." He spun to face Kris. "She's your buddy," he said accusingly. "Where is she?"

Kris merely shrugged.

Angrily turning back to the skaters, Alvin growled, "We'll have to do it one short." He clapped his hands. "In your places, please."

At about that time Sabrina, Bosley and Max Brown

were arriving at the front door of the arena. The scar-faced security guard opened the door at Max's ring.

As they entered the lobby, Max said, "This is John Bosley and Sabrina Duncan, Paul. No, you're not Paul. You're David."

"George," the uniformed man said.

"You're right," Max agreed. "George. Mr. Bosley has a special popcorn and peanut and candy concession tonight. Miss Duncan will be selling programs. My regular program hawker will be just inside the lobby, but Miss Duncan will move around the auditorium. We need her on such a gala night. Put Duncan and Bosley on your list."

"Yes sir."

"They'll be in and out all day," Max said. "They have to figure access routes, where to store their supplies, things like that."

"Yes sir," the man said again.

"Come on," Max told Bosley and Sabrina. "I'll show you around. Carry on, David."

Max led them from the lobby into the main corridor, then through one of the doors into the audience section of the auditorium. No one was seated there, but out on the ice the chorus was going through a routine, and Kris and her partner were practicing a clown act.

"I'd like a look at this man named Durgas," Sabrina said.

"Easily arranged," Max said. "Follow me."

They left Bosley in the auditorium. Max led Sabrina along the corridor to a tunnel leading toward the rink, and along it to a door lettered "Equipment Room." Max tried the door and found it locked.

As he raised his fist to knock, Sabrina said, "I would just as soon he didn't see me," and moved to one side of the door with her back against the wall. "Try to leave the door open."

Nodding, Max knocked. The door was opened and a male voice said, "Yes?"

The single word wasn't enough for Sabrina to tell if it was the voice of the man she had met in front of Helene's apartment. Max pushed into the room, saying,

"Dagbus, did you put those flags in the last two muskets?"

"Durgas," the man corrected.

Max left the door standing wide open. Sabrina walked by it quickly, glancing in as she passed. Both men were over by a workbench, where a stack of muskets lay. Max had his back to her, but the new prop man was in profile. He was the man she had met at Helene's apartment.

Sabrina then moved on to where the tunnel came out on the ice. Gingerly she walked across the ice the few feet to the railing separating it from the audience section, stepped over the railing and climbed up to where Bosley still stood at the back of the house.

"It's the same man I met at Helene's," Sabrina told him.

"So now we know he's involved. I better keep an eye on him, because he'd recognize you. You cover that security guard."

"What's going to be our excuse for hanging around all day?" Sabrina asked.

"You heard Max. We're checking access routes and possible storage spots."

"Oh, come on, Bosley. The guard is going to know that won't take all day. I think we simply ought to wait outdoors, and follow them if they leave."

"Perhaps. But a little discreet pumping first wouldn't hurt. I'll tackle Durgas, and you see what you can get from the fake George Boyer. Where do I find Durgas?"

Sabrina led him out into the corridor and gave him directions. As he headed for the Equipment Room, she went in the opposite direction toward the lobby.

Twenty minutes later, as Sabrina returned to where she had left Bosley, she met him and Max coming from the other direction.

"Get anything?" Bosley asked when they reached her.

"Sure," Sabrina said dryly. "I learned that when he's called in early like this—usually he doesn't get here until noon and closes up around eight P.M.—and has to

stay late, he brings both his lunch and his dinner. So it's unlikely he'll be leaving the building."

"You got more than I did," Bosley said. "I never before met so uncommunicative a man."

"You wanted to know about his lunch, you should ask me," Max said. "It's in a brown paper bag at the end of the workbench. About dinner, I couldn't say, unless it's in the bag too."

"Doesn't look as though either will be leaving here in the near future in any event," Bosley said. "Sabrina, maybe we ought to forget them long enough to round up our equipment for tonight."

"Sabrina's equipment, the programs," Max informed them, "I got in my office. I'll bring them when I come, about seven tonight. That'll give you plenty of time, because curtain time isn't until eight-thirty. The popcorn, peanuts and candy you got to buy somewhere, Bosley. I don't furnish that."

"Then I had better get organized," Bosley said. "Come on, Sabrina, let's go find a candy-and-peanut wholesaler."

Alvin Queen cut off rehearsal at one P.M., not wanting to tire his performers so much that their performance that night would suffer. He admonished them all to go home and take naps, so that they would be fresh that evening.

Kelly had never shown up. As Kris headed for the locker room, Alvin skated alongside of her.

"If you see Kelly, tell her she's fired," he said.

Kris merely shrugged without answering.

When she emerged from the locker room and through the entranceway leading into the tunnel, she found Sabrina and Bosley waiting for her. Sabrina explained that there was no point in hanging around in the hope that Durgas or the fake George Boyer would lead them to Kelly, because both had brought their lunches, and showed no signs of intending to leave the Sports Arena all day.

She concluded, "Bosley has his candy and peanuts

and popcorn all stored in the storage room, so we decided to take you to lunch."

"How nice!" Kris said. "Does that mean you'll pay, Boz?"

"Dutch treat," Bosley said.

As they strolled toward the lobby, Kris asked, "You see Durgas, Bree?"

She nodded. "He's the man I met at Helene's, all right. And I'm sure the new security guard is involved too."

Twenty-seven

Kris, Sabrina and Bosley all got back to the Sports Arena at seven, an hour and a half before show time. Kris headed for the locker room, Sabrina waited in the lobby for Max to arrive with the programs and Bosley headed for the storeroom to check his supplies.

Fifteen minutes later Bosley came from the storeroom, coatless, wearing a white apron, a little white, brimless cap, and with a changemaker attached to his belt. Suspended from a cord around his neck was a wooden tray full of candy, popcorn and peanuts.

He went through the nearest door into the auditorium and looked out over the vacant seats. Now, there were a discouragingly large number of them, something like twenty thousand. Without the faintest idea of what or who to look for, it was going to be quite a chore for him and Sabrina to figure out what was going to happen tonight, and for them to be in the right spot to counteract it when it did happen.

In the ladies' room off the locker room Kris was in her padded clown costume, and was putting on her

clown makeup for the first time. Following the detailed instructions Michael had given her, she whitened her face, drew thick, long lines of black radiating from her eyes to resemble huge eyelashes and painted on an enormous red mouth set in a silly smile. Then she fixed a round, cherry-red false nose over her own.

Examining herself in the mirror, she decided she looked pretty funny. She added the crowning touch by pinning her hair atop her head and putting on a bright red football helmet.

Max Brown strode in the front door of the arena carrying a large cardboard box. Handing it to Sabrina, he said, "Your programs. One dollar each. You should keep all but an armload in the storeroom, and go get more as you need them."

"What I planned to do," Sabrina said, heading away from him.

In the Equipment Room, Durgas laid the muskets on a tablelike cart, ready to wheel them along the tunnel to the edge of the rink when they were needed. Then he locked the door and went to pull his leather suitcase from its hiding place. Setting the case on the workbench, he removed from it two clips of thirty-caliber ammunition.

Picking up one of the muskets, he pried a painted metal cover from beneath its stock to disclose a narrow slot. He slipped one of the ammo clips into the slot, snapped it into place and drew back a small, nearly undetectable slide at the side of the stock to set a shell in the chamber. Laying the musket back down at the very rear of the cart, he picked up a second musket and repeated the process.

From the suitcase he next took his .45 automatic, pulled up the skirt of his suitcoat and thrust the gun into his hip pocket. Closing the suitcase, he put it back into its hiding place and unlocked the Equipment Room door.

Moments later the door opened and Max Brown came bustling in.

"Vegas," he said demandingly, "this morning you told me you would have those two last flags in the muskets before showtime. You got them in?"

"Durgas," the prop man said patiently. "Yes."

"Let's see."

Durgas picked up the first musket on the cart, elevated the muzzle and pressed the trigger. A flag popped out. Folding the flag and stuffing it back down the muzzle, he set down the musket and picked up another one. It, too, produced a flag when he pressed the trigger.

"About time," Max said, patting him on the shoulder. "Carry on, Vargas."

He hurried out again. Durgas gazed after him, shaking his head.

By eight P.M. the arena parking lot was jammed and there were no parking spots vacant on the street for blocks in any direction.

A convoy of four vehicles now drew up, double-parking right in front of the main entrance. The first car was a police car. The next two were black limousines, identical to each other and both bearing license plates reading "DIPLOMAT." Behind them was an ordinary sedan of light blue.

Two policemen left the radio car, the drivers of both limousines got out, and four muscular, conservatively dressed Secret Service men got from the blue sedan. The policemen and the Secret Service man glanced around in all directions, then one of the Secret Service men nodded to the chauffeurs.

The chauffeurs opened the back doors of the limousines. Three robed and bearded Arab sheiks emerged from each car. The policemen and Secret Service men surrounded them as they started for the building, politely brushing aside some curious onlookers.

The robed men were escorted across the lobby, into the corridor, and across it to the nearest door into the auditorium.

An usherette met them just inside the door and led

the way down an aisle to a rinkside section marked "RESERVED." "Right this way, gentlemen," she said pleasantly, gesturing for them to enter the reserved section.

Bosley, standing nearby, noted the group taking seats. Coming closer, he checked the section marker. It said "Section D-East."

In the box of programs Max Brown had given her Sabrina had found an orange sweatshirt with lettering on both its front and back, reading "Sports Arena—Programs." She dressed in red slacks and a white sweater, and the orange sweatshirt didn't go at all with the red slacks. She had no choice but to remove the sweater and put on the sweatshirt, however. It was a couple of sizes too large. Under the sweatshirt, at the corner of the box, Sabrina saw a roll of bills—a good many ones, but some fives and tens too—and beneath the roll a smallish, shoulder-strap leather purse in which she could carry the bills, to make change. Into the purse she slipped, too, some of the necessities from her own handbag, including her tiny coin purse.

Emerging from the storeroom, she was muttering under her breath about Max Brown just as the new prop man passed. He gave her a startled look of recognition and went on by without speaking.

Sabrina followed him along the tunnel to the corridor that circled the building, but only because she was going the same way. There he turned in the direction of the lobby. Sabrina, whose destination was the auditorium, paused before going in, to look after him. She saw him stop to speak to the security guard; then both looked her way. She went on into the auditorium.

It was then about a half-hour until showtime, and already nearly half the seats were filled. Spotting Bosley down near the rail, she went down the aisle to join him. He was peering at a group of Arabs surrounded by plainclothes guards in a reserved section. A uniformed policeman was posted at either end of the section.

"Who are the sheiks?" Sabrina asked.

Bosley shrugged. "Got me. But they must be important to have all that security around them!"

The scar-faced arena security guard came quietly down the aisle and said to Sabrina, "A phone call came for you at the box office. The box office won't call anybody to the phone there when they're selling tickets, but they took this message. You're supposed to call somebody named Charlie. I'll show you where there's a pay phone."

"Thank you," Sabrina said.

He led the way back up the aisle to the exit into the corridor, and along it to a pay phone on the wall. He stood waiting as Sabrina searched her bill-carrier and coin purse for a dime.

Finding one, she dropped it in the slot, then looked at the guard before dialing. "This is private business," she said, a bit nervous.

In the face of that blunt remark, he could do nothing but turn and walk away. She dialed the number, and Charlie Townsend answered in the middle of the first ring.

"You must have been sitting on the phone," she said.

"I was. Sabrina, I want you and Bosley to concentrate your attention on Section D-East tonight."

"All right," she said. "Any word on Kelly?"

"Everybody I know who's available is out looking," Charlie replied. "Nothing yet."

"I wish we knew why whoever grabbed her did it," Sabrina said. "We don't know if they're killers, or are just holding her somewhere. In fact we don't know anything. Why do you want Bosley and me to cover Section D-East? What are we looking for?"

"Because a stakeout I posted in front of the arena just phoned me that six sheiks from one of the Middle Eastern countries arrived there in black limousines with "Diplomat" plates similar to the one you and your drunken friend saw on different occasions. I phoned Reservations and found out they had bought out that section."

"What does it mean, Charlie?"

"Sabrina, my guess is that these sheiks are either the problem or the solution. One of the two limousines they arrived in is probably the one Kelly's abductors have been using. Maybe the abductors will be sitting in Section D-East. I don't know. But it's clear the trouble is coming from, or going to, that section."

"It is?" she said. "Maybe to *you*—but *I'm* only confused. It's not much to go on, Charlie."

"No," he agreed. "But it's all we have, so it will have to do. Pass the word to Bosley."

"All right, Charlie," she said. "Keep your fingers crossed, because I think we're going to need more luck than skill on this one."

Hanging up, she returned to the auditorium. Several people stopped her to buy programs as she descended the aisle toward Bosley, and he was busy vending his wares when she finally reached him. When there was a moment's break, she told him what Charlie had said.

Gazing at the robed Arabs and their entourage, Bosley complained in a frustrated voice, "We don't know what we're looking for."

"We will know, when we see it," Sabrina said. "Let's just hope that won't be too late." After a pause she added, "We'd *better* know. Kelly's life may depend on it."

Twenty-eight

Kelly's arrival in the storage room at the abandoned factory stirred momentary excitement among the four other prisoners already there, but as soon as she had explained how she happened to become a prisoner, they lapsed back into lethargy. By now they

had all been there long enough to have sunk into various stages of depression.

Kelly was still in her dancing-girl outfit, sans the veil, and was still barefoot. She removed the bells from her wrists and ankles in order to stop their incessant tinkling every time she moved, and took the gold rings from her toes.

She gradually managed to get out of the other four prisoners how they had been abducted, but none of them was very communicative. All seemed to have given up hope of ever being rescued. After a time, Kelly gave up trying to engage anyone in conversation and lapsed into silence too.

About 6:30 P.M. the sliding door opened and two large men came in, one carrying five takeout meals, the other holding a pistol. The man carrying the dinners wore a Nixon mask, the other an ape mask. Kelly recognized them by their general configurations and bodily movements. The one in the Nixon mask was the man with the pushed-in nose whom Kalik had addressed as Faud. The ape mask covered the head of the man with the gold front teeth whom Kalik had referred to as Grout.

"Why the masks?" she asked them. "I know you're Faud and Grout."

"The others don't," the man in the Nixon mask said coldly. "We didn't let them see our faces, so we wouldn't have to kill them afterward. You seeing them gives us a little problem." After a beat he added, "And *you* a bigger one."

When the men went out again, little Iggy Svensen said to Kelly, "Did he mean they're going to kill you?"

"Sounded like it to me," Kelly said. "Eventually it's going to occur to them that they're going to have to kill all of you too. I know who all four of my kidnappers were, and they'll figure I've told you."

"Don't tell us," Iggy said quickly.

"They'll never believe that I didn't," Kelly sighed. "So you may as well know. Providing you want to."

There was general silence as the four looked at each other fearfully. Finally Paul Boyer said, "You're

probably right. They never will believe us. So who are they?"

"They're all four Arabs," Kelly said, "apparently connected with one of the Arab consulates here, since they run around in a limousine with 'Diplomat' plates. The two who were just in here are named Faud and Grout. The other two took over the jobs of security guard and prop man at the arena. A man named Kalik replaced you as security guard, Paul. And one named Durgas has your job, Iggy."

The prospect of possible death had jolted the group from its lethargy and into a discussion of how to get out of their captivity. Dinner was finished and the guards had come to collect the dirty dishes before anyone came up with a feasible plan, though.

Iggy Svensen and Paul Boyer were both pacing up and down, throwing out random thoughts, most of which had little to do with the problem.

"It must have been chloroform," Iggy said. "Did they use it on the rest of you?"

"On me and Helene," Jack Ward answered.

"Not on me," Paul said. "They just jerked me into the car."

"Me either," Kelly said. "They held a gun on me."

Paul and Iggy, pacing toward each other, swung wide to avoid collision. Paul said, "The question is still the same. *Why?* What did we do?"

Kelly spoke again. "In the restaurant I could only hear snatches of conversation, because the music was too loud. But one thing I caught was a reference to Section D-East."

Jack Ward, seated on the pile of lumber next to Helene, mused "Section D-East . . . You say they're all Arabs? Maybe that's an oil field they own, or something."

Coming to a halt, Paul said, "No. Section D-East, that's where the VIPs sit at the Sports Arena."

Kelly, seated on the floor with her feet tucked under her, came to her feet. "Wait a minute! The file that was broken into in Max's office, it had the seating arrangement for the Sports Arena." She looked at Paul.

"Did Max tell you who will be seated in Section D-East?"

Furrowing his brow, the short security guard answered, "I think he said it was a bunch of oil people."

"Oil people," Kelly repeated thoughtfully. Then she said with sudden enlightenment, "Hey, hold on! Oil, Arabs, the Arab restaurant. That's the connection. That's it. Gotta be. Anyone have the time?"

Looking at his wristwatch, Iggy said, "Seven forty-three."

"What day?"

"What day?" Helene repeated. "It's Wednesday. Opening night."

"Opening night. Right. Listen, we *have* to get out of here." Kelly went over to the door, grasped the inside handle and attempted to force it open. It didn't move.

"It doesn't budge, pretty face," Paul said. "We're stuck here for the duration."

Kelly gazed up at a skylight in the ceiling, then over at the pile of lumber on which Jack and Helene were seated.

"We thought of that," Jack Ward said. "Leaning one of these logs at an angle against the wall and climbing up it. They're too heavy. All four of us couldn't lift one."

Kelly glanced up at the skylight again, then regarded Ward estimatingly. "You look pretty strong. Come over here."

Obediently he got up and walked over. Kelly positioned him directly beneath the skylight, then signaled Paul Boyer to come over.

When the little man had, she said. "Get up on his shoulders."

After giving her a strange glance, he shrugged and climbed up Ward's back to seat himself on his shoulders.

"Now hold steady," Kelly said. "I'm going to climb up both of you and stand on Paul's shoulders. Iggy and Helene, you can steady me."

"It'll never work," Ward said.

"There's no other choice," Kelly told him. "It has to work."

She started to climb up Ward's back, helped and propped by Iggy and Helene. When she got up onto Paul's shoulders, resting on her knees and holding onto his head to steady herself, Iggy and Helene transferred their efforts to holding Jack steady, who was beginning to sway.

Kelly cautiously raised one foot to set it on Paul Boyer's shoulder, then raised the other to set it on the other shoulder. For a few moments she continued to grip his head to steady herself, then she attempted to rise.

The totem pole leaned backward, then forward. Kelly changed her inevitable fall into a dive, landing on her hands, tucking her head under and making a gymnast's roll. She bounced to her feet unhurt. Iggy and Helene's steadying of Ward kept him from falling. Paul climbed down from his shoulders. They all looked at each other with resignation.

Kelly said, more to herself than to the others, "A day late and a dollar short. Got to be a way. Got to be."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," Iggy said.

As the others glanced at him inquiringly, Iggy walked over to regard the pile of ten-by-eights. "Think we could roll one of these off on the floor and drag it over under the skylight?" he asked.

"All five of us, maybe," Jack Ward said. "But we couldn't lift the end up to the skylight."

"It only has to be flat on the floor," Iggy said. "Let's try it."

They managed to lower one of the heavy beams to the floor and drag it over to the skylight. Iggy had them position it beneath the edge of the skylight. Then he had them drag a second beam over and lay it on top of the first, making a fulcrum sixteen inches high. There was a ten-by-two board about ten feet long lying in a corner. Iggy had Jack and Paul carry it over and lay it across the double beam like a see-saw.

Understanding what he was doing, Kelly ran over to give him a hug. "You're beautiful."

"That's true," Iggy said immodestly. "Before I was a skater, I used to be in the circus." He turned to the little security guard. "Paulie, how do you feel about flying?"

Looking from the seesaw up at the skylight, Paul shook his head. "I'm afraid of heights. I can't even go on a kid's swing without getting nauseous."

Iggy turned to Kelly. "Then it has to be you, sweets. After Paul, you're the lightest."

"I was hoping you'd say that," Kelly said ruefully.

She stepped onto the end of the seesaw that was directly under the skylight. Iggy steered Paul over to the other side of the seesaw and the two of them stood side by side, their arms linked about each other's waists.

"Okay, Jack, up on our shoulders!" Iggy instructed. "Helene, you steady us."

Ward, already in stocking feet, didn't have to remove his shoes. With athletic ease he lifted himself up on the smaller men's shoulders. Helene steadied the two men on the bottom.

When Ward was standing erect on their shoulders, Iggy said, "Just land with your weight centered and even, Jack. Don't try to push it."

"Okay," Ward said.

"Ready, Kelly?"

"Can you be scared and ready at the same time?" Kelly asked.

"Hands overhead," Iggy ordered her. "And don't jump, Kelly! Just let the board shoot you right up there."

Kelly raised her hands overhead and looked up at the skylight. "Now!" Iggy said. Jack's feet hit the raised end of the seesaw, driving it to the floor. Kelly's body shot upward.

Her target was the rim of the skylight on the side that was slightly open. She was surprised when her fingers gripped it, having expected disaster. She hung for a moment, then swung her feet upward, between

her arms, set the soles of her feet against the glass and shoved upward. The skylight swung wide open and onto the roof with a small crash.

Apparently the crash wasn't heard by their guards, because no one came to investigate. Kelly hooked her knees over the skylight rim and pulled herself up and onto the roof in a seated position. Climbing to her feet, she peered back down at the four people looking upward.

"I'll come back and get you or send help," she said.

Giving the good-luck sign, she headed for the fire ladder at the edge of the roof.

The first car Kelly tried to flag down stopped with a screech of brakes. The plump, middle-aged male driver gawked at her in happy disbelief as she climbed in next to him.

Probably he was contemplating driving her to the nearest park, but she spoiled his dream by saying crisply, "Police business. Get me to the Sports Arena as fast as you can."

The ice show had already started when Kelly ran in the front entrance, and there was no one in the lobby but Max Brown. Gazing at her scanty outfit bug eyed, he stripped off his tuxedo jacket and threw it around her shoulders. It covered her like a short topcoat.

As he started to sputter, "What—what—?" Kelly said, "No time for questions, Max." She thrust a slip of paper into his hand. "Just call Charlie and give him that address. He'll find Jack, Helene, Paul and Iggy there."

"All of them?"

"All of them," she confirmed.

"Are they all right? What's going on?"

"No time, Max. I'll explain later."

She ran into the corridor and along it to the tunnel leading to the locker room. There was a janitor in the room's doorway, mopping the floor. As she started past him, Kalik and Durgas emerged from the Equip-

ment Room, below. They did double takes when they saw her, then rushed toward her.

Spinning, Kelly ran back the other way. But, passing the janitor, who had backed into the tunnelway, she scooped up his bucket and sent a torrent of soapy water along the floor at her pursuers. The two men's feet hit the water, slid from under them, and they skidded along the floor on the seats of their pants. The astonished janitor gazed after them with his mouth open as they jumped to their feet and raced toward the fleeing girl.

By then Kelly had rounded the corner into the corridor and had disappeared. Since they had been sliding along on their seats when that happened, neither Kalik nor Durgas noticed which way she had run. When they got to the corridor, she was nowhere in sight. They split up to search in opposite directions.

Kelly had turned left, then had darted into the tunnel leading to the Training Room. When she reached it, she ran inside and closed the door behind her. Billy Brinks was there, alone.

"Billy, you have to hide me!" she said urgently.

He gazed at her peculiar outfit in astonishment, gawking at the diaphanous pantaloons hanging below the black tuxedo coat. "What?" he exclaimed.

"I can get Helene back!" Kelly said rapidly. "But I need your help."

Billy's eyes lighted up. "Helene? She's all right?"

"Alive and well. But you have to hide me. *Right now!*"

Once an idea sank into Billy's head, he was capable of fast reaction. Lifting Kelly bodily, he dropped her into a laundry hamper half full of towels. As she burrowed down beneath them, she heard the door open.

Durgas' voice said, "Where is she?"

"Who?" Billy inquired.

"The one called Kelly. Did she come in here?"

"All the skaters are either in the tunnels or on the ice," Billy said.

"She came this way," Durgas insisted. "She must be here."

Kelly heard the sound of Durgas walking around, opening and closing locker doors. A slight jolt to the laundry bin told Kelly that Billy had backed his oversized frame against it.

Durgas' voice, coming from directly in front of Billy, demanded, "Where is she?"

"I told you all the skaters are in the tunnel or on the ice," Billy said.

"Durgas thinks you lie."

There followed a series of grunts, as of wrestlers locked in combat. Kelly risked poking out her head.

Apparently Durgas had attempted to push Billy out of the way to look into the laundry bin, and had run into a surprise. As powerful a man as he was, Durgas was on his knees, grunting in pain. Billy, gripping both the man's wrists, held him immobile.

Having made his point, Billy released his grip. Durgas, still on his knees, rubbed his wrists. Kelly ducked down again. Then she heard the door open a second time, and Kalik's voice. "We're late! Come on. What are you doing on your knees?"

There was the sound of Durgas scrambling to his feet. "The girl," he said. "We've got to find her!"

"She can't do anything *now*," Kalik said. "It's too late. Get everything ready."

Footsteps moved toward the door. Then Durgas' voice called viciously from the doorway, "Lucky for you I got to leave!"

The door slammed. Kelly rose up out of the towels, jumped from the hamper and hugged Billy.

Heading for the door, she said, "Come on, Billy. I've got to get into costume, and I need you to run interference in case those two catch up with me."

Billy lumbered out after Kelly.

They reached the locker room without incident, and Kelly quickly changed into her costume. Billy knelt to tie on her skates. Just as he finished and rose to his feet, Alvin Queen came in. He stopped short when he saw Kelly.

"You expect to go on in the middle of the show?" he asked. "After the disappearing act you pulled on me?"

"Sorry, it couldn't be helped," Kelly said.

"Well, I cannot help but forbid you to go on the ice."

"Have to, Alvin."

"My dear child, on the ice, it is only what *Alvin* 'has to.' "

Billy moved close to the director and glared down at him. "*She has to be on the ice.*"

Drawing himself up to his full height, Alvin asked, "Are you, Billy-the-towel-boy, telling me, Alvin, the artistic director of this whole show, are you telling me what to do?"

"Yes!"

Alvin blinked, suddenly aware by Billy's expression that he was on the verge of being torn apart. "Actually, the routines do work better with an even number in the chorus line," he said. Turning, he left the room.

Kelly gave Billy another hug. The big man looked embarrassed.

"When will you get back Helene?" he asked.

"Soon, Billy, soon," she said.

She exited by the door into the tunnel, and Billy followed after her.

Kris and Michael were doing their barrel-jumping act. Kelly and Billy waited at the end of the tunnel, watching. When the act ended, the two clowns skated over to the tunnel where Kelly and Billy stood.

When she saw Kelly, Kris threw her arms about her. "Kelly, are you okay?"

"I'm fine. So are the others. Kris, whatever is going to happen tonight concerns Section D-East."

"I know," Kris said. "Charlie passed that on to Sabrina. The trouble is, we don't know *what's* going to happen. Do you?"

Kelly shook her head. "Not an inkling."

"So what do we do?"

"Play it by ear, honey. Play it by ear."

The chorus was coming out on the ice from another

tunnel. Leaving Kris, Kelly skated over to join them.

Sabrina was no longer selling programs, since the show was now nearly half over. But Bosley was still busily peddling his wares. She therefore was seeing the show, but he wasn't. Bosley had his back to the rink, selling some peanuts, when Kelly skated onto the ice. When she saw her, Sabrina ran down the aisle to grab Bosley's arm.

Shaking her off, he said, "Hey, I'm busy!"

"It's Kelly," Sabrina said.

That turned Bosley around, leaving his customer with an outstretched one-dollar bill and no peanuts. Peering out at the ice, a huge smile formed on his face when he saw Kelly in the chorus line.

Twenty-nine

Sabrina and Bosley continued to keep close watch on Section D-East. When they weren't on the ice, Kelly and Kris concentrated on the reserved section too. But no one saw any sign of anything out-of-the-way.

As the end of the show neared, Kris and Michael went into their final clown act. This was a dance during which both repeatedly fell and picked each other up. Toward the end of the dance an attendant skated out to set up ten bowling pins. As he skated away again, Michael grabbed Kris' right wrist, swung his back to her and flipped her over his shoulder to land on her back. Now grabbing both her wrists, he spread his legs and propelled her between them headfirst, at the bowling pins. Her football helmet hit the headpin to score a strike. The audience roared with laughter.

As the music for the 1776 finale began, Kris and Michael each scooped up five of the bowling pins and

skated to a tunnel directly across from the one that led to the locker room. Dropping the pins in the barrel they had used in the previous act, they stood watching as Durgas, in the tunnel opposite them, handed out muskets. The scar-faced security guard was standing next to Durgas, also watching.

As the stars and the chorus line moved out onto the ice, carrying their muskets, a tiny alarm sounded in Kris' brain. Something she should remember, but which escaped her, nagged at her. It was something that would explain the whole mystery, she sensed, if only she could recall it. It was like having a word on the tip of your tongue, but going blank; you knew the word, but couldn't say it. Similarly, Kris knew the clue to the whole mystery was in the thing nagging at her memory.

She watched the beginning of the 1776 routine, concentrating on Luisi and Olga, but periodically glancing at the reserved section where the robed sheiks and their guards sat.

A picture formed in Kris' mind of the first rehearsal with actual muskets. Alvin was saying to the two stars in outraged astonishment, "Your positioning was way off," and Luisi was replying, "Sorry. We forgot." Another brief memory skipped through her mind. Kelly had said, "That's the first time they've goofed." Kris had commented, "Well, they're only human," and Kelly had said, "I wonder."

Kris' mind shot back to the incident that had brought on these exchanges. Luisi and Olga, at the command "Up muskets," had changed their direction, to face east, *aiming directly at Section D-East!*

The clue she was searching for was no longer merely in the back of Kris' mind. She realized what was going to happen. She stepped from the tunnel onto the ice and skated around the edge of the rink to its opposite side.

Alvin Queen and Max Brown, who had recovered his tuxedo jacket from the locker room, were watching the show from the tunnel leading to the Training Room.

"What is *she* doing?" Alvin inquired in a high voice. "The clowns aren't on now."

Max, who knew things Alvin didn't, immediately deduced that Kris' unusual behavior must have something to do with whatever mysterious thing was expected to happen. Turning, he moved hurriedly along the tunnel to the corridor, entered the auditorium and hustled down the aisle to where Bosley and Sabrina were stationed.

Kris halted just below where Sabrina and Bosley stood and made an exaggerated motion for Sabrina to join her on the ice. The audience, thinking this was part of the act, reacted with a few chuckles but no outright laughter.

Sabrina, carrying the few programs she had left, trotted down the aisle to the railing. Kris grabbed her arms and pulled her over the railing onto the ice, where they floundered together in a sort of awkward dance to keep their balance, and finally made it. Kris released Sabrina and the latter balanced precariously on her leather-soled shoes.

"What are you doing?" Sabrina asked in astonishment.

"I have to talk to you," Kris said in a low voice.

"In front of twenty thousand people?"

"Just listen and act funny," Kris said, grabbing some of Sabrina's programs and tossing them into the audience.

People in the audience reached out to grab the programs. Laughter began rolling down from the stands. Sabrina, meanwhile, resisted the programs, being taken away from her, and there began a tug-of-war between her and Kris, gradually won by Kris as she managed to pry two or three programs at a time from Sabrina's grip and toss them to the audience. Alvin, viewing the scene in horror, gave up and fled toward the Training Room to have a cry.

"Luisi and Olga have *real* guns," Kris said to Sabrina. "At up-musket time I think they're going to open up on the VIPs in Section D-East."

"What do we do?" Sabrina asked as she allowed another two programs to be torn from her grip.

"You and Bosley handle Durgas and that scar-faced security guard." She nodded toward the pair, watching from the nearby tunnel that led to the locker room. "Kelly and I will take care of Luisi and Olga."

"Right," Sabrina said, allowing the last two programs to be wrested from her.

After flinging the programs into the audience, Kris skated back around the edge of the rink toward the tunnel where she had previously stood, and where Michael still waited. Sabrina now slid and shuffled back over to the railing, stepped over it and ran back up the aisle to where Bosley and Max stood together.

"Come on!" she said urgently.

"Where?" Bosley asked.

"To the locker-room tunnel. Come on."

"Charlie said we should watch Section D-East," Bosley objected.

"We'll watch it from the tunnel," Sabrina said, pulling at his arm.

"What's going to happen?" Max asked.

"A killing, if we don't stop it. Maybe a massacre!"

This was enough to convince both Bosley and Max. As Sabrina started running up the aisle, they ran after her.

Back at her tunnel entrance, Kris turned the barrel containing the tenpins over on its side and rolled it to the edge of the ice. Michael watched her curiously, but made no comment.

On the ice, the stars and the chorus had nearly reached that point of the routine in which the muskets came up. Across the rink from Kris, Kalik and Durgas were anticipating the next move with manic joy.

"Tomorrow," Kalik said, "our country will be in the hands of the true patriots."

The muskets of the chorus line came up and pointed west. The muskets of the two stars came up and pointed east, toward Section D-East. Kris took aim and rolled her barrel across the ice.

"Kelly!" she yelled.

The barrel hit the chorus line, knocking over those skaters in the center like dominoes. Two fell into Luisi, knocking him down and causing him to drop his musket. It hit stock down, discharging to spurt a half-dozen bullets upward. Another skater fell against Olga, not knocking her down, but throwing her off balance enough to make her lose her aim.

The music at this point had reached a crescendo, drowning out the sound of the shots to the audience, **but not to the chorus.**

At the end of the line, Kelly was not among those barreled over. Startled by the machine-gunlike sound, she glanced upward. The huge papier-mâché Liberty Bell hanging from the ceiling had a half-dozen holes in it.

It wasn't until then that Kelly realized Luisi and Olga carried real guns with real bullets in them. But the moment she did, she reacted. Olga was just re-aiming when Kelly skated forward in the crouched position of a hockey player and swung her musket by the barrel to smash into Olga's skates. The female star's feet were knocked out from under her and she sat heavily. Her musket also fell to the ice, but landed flat and failed to go off.

Kris was, meantime, speeding over on her skates. The bowling pins had spilled out all over the ice from the rolling barrel. Kris scooped up two en route and handed one to Kelly as she braked to an ice-spraying halt. Kelly, who had dropped her musket, grabbed the bowling pin by its neck and fell on Olga.

Luisi was just struggling to his feet. Kris flopped on top of him, driving him flat again.

"You fool, get off!" Luisi hissed.

"Good night," Kris said, cracking him over the head **with her tenpin.**

"Sleep tight," Kelly said to Olga, giving her the same treatment.

The audience, thinking it was all a deliberate slapstick ending, howled with laughter.

Sabrina, Bosley and Max had by now run down into the tunnel leading to the locker room. Billy Brinks,

who had tired of watching the show from here, was coming up the tunnel to return to the Training Room tunnel.

As they raced past him, Max shouted, "Billy, help!"

Billy did an about-face and lumbered after them.

Kalik and Durgas, at the tunnel's rinkside end, seeing their plan end in chaos, both drew pistols and aimed them up in the direction of the nearby Section D-East. Sabrina threw a body block into Kalik from behind, knocking him off balance but not off his feet. Bosley raised his tray of popcorn, peanuts and candy overhead and brought it down on Durgas' head. Bags flew in every direction and Durgas fell facedown, stunned but not out. Bosley then dropped his full weight on him, and a moment later Max added his.

Kalik had swung around to aim his gun at Sabrina, just as Billy arrived. A massive fist collided with Kalik's jaw, stretching him out cold.

"Are you okay, Sabrina?" Billy asked.

"Billy, I'm okay and you're okay. Really okay!"

To the accompaniment of both music and applause, Kris and Kelly were skating over to the tunnel, dragging the unconscious Luisi and Olga on their backs by the wrists. Billy and Sabrina reached out to help them off the ice.

Max, perched on Durgas' spine, said triumphantly, "Between me and the nut-eater, you're not so tough, Yergus."

"Durgas!" the facedown man said angrily.

Shrugging, Max asked, "What's in a *name*?"

Thirty

The following morning the angels and Bosley were gathered in the Beverly Hills office, talking to Charlie over the telephone-speaker system.

"If we hadn't stopped them," Kris said, "they would have shot all the people in that reserved section."

"And tried to gain control of an awful lot of the world's oil," Charlie said.

"Are they all from one group?" Sabrina asked.

"No. A dissident group from the underground of six Arab countries."

"The sheiks," Kelly said, "come here for an OPEC meeting, go out for a little entertainment and they're the stars in a shooting gallery. And they don't even know it."

"They do now," Charlie said. "They're on their way home with presents for the loyal and plans to put the underground six feet lower."

"Well, if we go out of business," Kris remarked, "I can always clown around."

"And I can go into belly dancing," Kelly added.

"Which reminds me," Bosley said. "What is this expense, fifty dollars for a belly-dancing costume?"

"I bought everything but her perfume," Kelly told him.

"Which reminds me, Bosley," Sabrina said. "We need ten or twelve dollars."

"For what?"

"Give them the money, Bosley," Charlie said. "They deserve it, no questions asked. Congratulations, angels."

Mason Fairchild was seated next to his cardboard-box bed, his back against the wall of the Sports Arena. Seated on the grass facing him were the three angels. Sabrina was pouring wine into crystal glasses and passing them around.

Raising his glass, Fairchild said, "Vintage wine and a trio of lovelies. I'll tell you the truth, my beauties. I deserve this. Here's to my health and your heart, and may love abound in this needful world."

All drank to that.

Kris said to Sabrina, "You think we can get Mason to reform?"

"And give up wine?" Sabrina said, aghast.

"Not so long as there's a water shortage," Kelly said.

"Patriots!" Mason Fairchild said. "You are still true patriots!"

They all drank to that too.



KELLY! KRIS! SABRINA! QUICK, BEFORE IT MELTS!

Our delectable darlings have had their brains and beauty put to some challenging tests before, but this time maestro Charlie has outdone himself. He's got them laced into skates, passing themselves off as ice show chorines. Soon they're busily defrosting a set of cold clues to a robbery where nothing was taken and the sudden "disappearance" of the show's top stars. With the help or hindrance of an apoplectic impresario, a flamboyant choreographer, an over-imaginative drunk, and a fat, feeble-minded trainer the angels are closing in on the answers—and a deep freeze finish for all three!

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A SPELLING-GOLDBERG PRODUCTION

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and

DAVID DOYLE

Created by IVAN GOFF and BEN ROBERTS

Based on the script

"ANGELS ON ICE"

By RICK EDELSTEIN